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WAFCA Commends JFC Action to Support Student Mental Health

The Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies commends action by the Joint Finance Committee yesterday to add \$750,000 to the Governor's proposed \$2.5 million for grants to support expansion of school-based mental health services. These grants coupled with the Governor's other school mental health initiatives and the JFC prior approval of new Medicaid funded consultation options for students will significantly advance Wisconsin's efforts to build healthy, resilient youth and safe, supportive centers of learning.

In communities across the state, local schools are partnering with mental health providers, funders and families to bring effective treatment options to children in the school setting. These model programs are expanding access and helping parents, teachers and mental health professionals collaborate to advance the mental well-being of all students.

One in five students has a diagnosable mental health concern, which impacts their ability to focus and learn. Wisconsin's efforts to infuse mental health services in schools show that treatment works. Students who access these services in school feel better, improve their grades and are more likely to stay in school and graduate.

Linda Hall, WAFCA Executive Director, emphasized that these grants will enable expansion of services in underserved regions of the state and enhance the capacity for schools to adopt trauma-informed practices. "Beyond the benefits for underserved students, this investment in the mental well-being of our schools aligns with the state's growing reputation as a national leader in trauma-informed care, through initiatives like Fostering Futures. This funding will enable more schools to create safe environments that support learning and build resilience for all our students."

Championed by First Lady Tonette Walker, Fostering Futures is a statewide initiative supporting efforts by public and private sector entities to reduce toxic stress and improve the life-long health and well-being for all Wisconsinites. Fostering Futures inspired the recent introduction of federal legislation, House Resolution 443 authored by Congressman Mike Gallagher, which encourages the use of trauma-informed practices.

WAFCA thanks Representative Mike Rohrkaste and Senator Alberta Darling for championing expanded access to mental health services for Wisconsin students.

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WAFCA is a member association that works to improve the lives of families and children in Wisconsin. Our member agencies provide a wide array of prevention and supportive services such as foster care, in-home support, counseling, and mental health treatment. WAFCA represents over 50 child and family serving agencies and leaders in the field and advocates for the more than 250,000 individuals and families that they serve each year.