

# TODAY'S CO-PARENT

2021 Edition, Issue 1

FEBRUARY, 2021



## TSUNAMI OF SUPPORT FOR SHARED PARENTING IN WI!

BY: DON HUBIN *CHAIRMAN OF NPO*

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[National Parents Organization](#), the largest shared parenting organization in America, partnered with [Wisconsin for Children and Families](#) to sponsor the first-ever survey of the opinions of over 500 Wisconsinites about shared parenting when parents are living apart. The survey, which was conducted independently by [Researchscape International](#), revealed **overwhelming—near unanimous—support for shared parenting**. Here are some highlights of the opinions of Wisconsin residents:

**97%** believe that “it is in a child’s best interest to have as much time as possible with each parent” when the parents are div. or separated.

**94%** believe that when parents are separating “it is generally more appropriate” for children to “have equal or near equal access to and time with each of their parents.”

**96%** say they “would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports children spending significant, up to equal, amounts of time with each parent following separation or divorce.”

**96%** hold that “children have the right to spend equal or nearly equal time with both parents who are fit and willing to be parents

*-Continued on page 4*

**WFCF** solely survives on **donations** to continue to provide **our newsletter, helpline service, and monthly meetings in 10 areas** in WI, each month. Donations also make it possible for WFCF to continue **talking with our legislators on the benefits of shared parenting**

**for our children**, and for their parents, as well as for society as a whole.

There are several ways to help us (WFCF) continue to provide these services.

**JOIN:** <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/join.htm>

**VOLUNTEER:** <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/volunteering.htm>

**DONATE:** <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/join.htm> *bottom of the page for donations.*

We are Wisconsin’s Oldest “**Separated Parents Organization**” having been formed in 1988. We have been hosting our Monthly Support and Network Separated Parents Night Out Meetings since 2000 and are a 100% volunteer organization that has always and will always believe that

**Kids NEED BOTH Parents**

# A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT *Tommy Bickel*

**STILL**.....Due to health concerns all of WFCF *in person* meetings each month have been cancelled. To continue to **provide help** to people involved with family court or just separated parent issues, we have **initiated four individual night ZOOM meetings** where people can ask questions and talk over viable solutions. A big THANK YOU to Mary Ciano, Aaron Bradt and Bob Moore for making these happen. Information about the four ZOOM meetings can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinFathersForChildren-AndFamilies>

**WFCF** board member **Jonathon Koch** has put in a **HUGE** amount of time preparing us for the Child Support Advisory meeting, hopefully...in 2021. We talk about that more in an article in this issue.

A new legislative session has started here in WI, and we are actively promoting previous bills as well as **two new additional bills**.



Below is a listing of the legislative actions we will be supporting:

**AB 95:** <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab95.pdf> Future contingencies allowed in placement orders if parents both agree. Without this it is VERY difficult if not

“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child’s success is the positive involvement of (both) parents.” *- Jane Hull*

impossible for an unmarried parent with a newborn to establish a significant relationship with both parents post infancy. There is a *presumption with the courts that not changing an initial placement order is in a child’s best interest. Potential added disruption.* **This bill will come from Rep. Rodriguez’s office,** as a new bill.

**AB97:** <https://docs.legis.wiscconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab97.pdf> Involvement and cooperation of both parents is **in a child’s best interest.** THIS BILL WILL **NOT** be reintroduced? **Both parents** working together is clearly in their child’s best interest, and is cer-

tainly the **best** situation for kids.

**AB98:** <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab98.pdf> Updates a few of the 16 factors and requires Judges/Court Commissioners to provide a written explanation if less than shared placement is ordered. **Parents de-**

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**serve to know** the reasoning behind why a decision was made that may limit their parental time with their shared children.

We will work to have the bills that did not make it to completion **reintroduced** in the new session starting January **2021**.

*(Continued on page 3)*

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For PDF versions of our WFCF newsletter—email: [wfcftreasurer@outlook.com](mailto:wfcftreasurer@outlook.com)

## FROM THE PRESIDENT CONT'D

(Continued from page 2)

**AB 209:** <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/ab209.pdf> Co-parenting training that is under \$50 or **free** online, does NOT have to be done in person/*together*. Over half the counties in WI now mandate it, as do **all the surrounding states**. This training has **proven** to help parents work well together as separated **co-parents**.

**We are also preparing two additional new bills for the 2021 legislative session:**

A modification to statute 767.41 that iterates ***shared parenting is in a child's best interest***

An addendum to 767 physical placements -. ***The court shall presume, for either temporary or permanent orders, shared physical placement is in the best interest of the child.***

A modification to the **Parenting Plan** that starts with **joint parental involvement** is in a **child's best interest**.

Our goal as **WFCF** along with **NPO-WI** is to become **better** at clearly explaining current problems for so many children with separated parents in ways our legislators can understand.

We believe this will lead to providing our legislators with **viable legislative solutions**, and to assigning the **appropriate urgency** to these separat-

ed family issues. Every year we wait, **thousands of WI children** with separated parents, are left to go through childhood with **only one involved parent** to assist and guide them. That one issue makes all those children much more susceptible to **trouble** in school, **trouble** with police, and **trouble** with drugs, pregnancy, and suicide. **WI currently leads the nation in the number of two involved parents for children**, but thousands and thousands of children in WI are still left to fend with **only one** involved parent.

There are also three bills that the State BAR has initiated that we will support as they improve separated parenting potential trouble spots.

- One bill addresses **Denovo hearings** and provides a statewide standard of 20 days to file, and 60 days for hearing. There are differences in counties currently, and it is confusing. **Denovo** filings are **VERY** important actions with temporary placement decisions, if the decision is not an agreement between parents.
- Partial **stipulations** in divorce proceedings. Frequently placement is agreed on early by parents, and the division of assets can take much longer. This bill will allow those stipulations to become part of a final order early in process, instead of waiting until all issues are stipulated. The importance of placement is paramount, and asset divi-

sion is secondary. Agreements can not then be used as leverage in other negotiations (assets and debts).

- **Financials exchange frequency.** This has been an area that had no standard requirements. Income changes are used in both the percentage calculator situations as well as the shared parenting calculator placement situations. At this point a change in an obligation is initiated by a threshold of *substantial change* in incomes. The suggested frequency of exchange of income by both parents, is annual. The definition of what information is required is identified, and a date this must be completed by is also identified. The exchange of this financial information by both parents, does not automatically initiate any change in obligation. To initiate a change in an obligation will continue to occur with the same legal actions that are required currently.

Lastly there are a couple of legislative bills that came from the study committee regarding **military personal and family court issues. AB 93,102**

- One addresses housing allowances, and how they are used to calculate a support obligation. These allowances are tied to geographical **actual** costs, and that needs to be considered.
- The other bill insures that the potential of being *called up*, is **not** used to influence a placement decision.

## WFCF NEEDS YOU / TSUNAMI OF SUPPORT (CONTINUED)

We **need** a new newsletter editor ASAP!

WFCF benefitted greatly from board member Kevin Monahan's skills over the last three years with our newsletter. Kevin singlehandedly brought our newsletter from a mid-90's old look to a new, modern, attractive current look. Kevin now has a large amount of things

on his plate, and needs to step down as our newsletter editor. We need a **new person** to step up, that has *Microsoft Publisher* experience, and can donate an hour or two each month toward helping WFCF continue to publish a quarterly or triannual newsletter. Our newsletter goes to all members of WFCF via email, and is published on our

Facebook page and website platform, and is mailed to all legislators and over 100 other groups and organizations in WI.

If you can **HELP** WFCF please send an email to [wfcftreasurer@outlook.com](mailto:wfcftreasurer@outlook.com)

## TSUNAMI OF SUPPORT - *Continued from page 1:*

- following divorce or separation."

85% would support "a change in Wisconsin law that creates a rebuttable presumption that shared parenting is in the best interest of a child after parental separation."

81% believe that when there is conflict between parents, awarding sole custody of children to just one parent *increases* that conflict.

It is important to note, especially in these politically polarized times that the **support for the sharing of parental responsibilities when parents are living apart cuts across every demographic divide: race, age, education, religion, income, political affiliation, and gender.**

There are steps that our Wisconsin's legislature can, and should, take to help make shared parenting the norm in Wisconsin. Creating a legal presumption that the substantial sharing of parental responsibilities is in children's best interest would address multiple problems. It would help to break the outdated custodial-parent/noncustodial-parent model that too many parents fall into by default. It would signal to parents the benefits to children of shared parenting and the likely outcome of litigation, thereby reducing the legal costs of establishing a shared parenting arrangement. And it would reassure parents that divorce/separation need not diminish their relationship with their children, thereby lowering the level of terror that some parents face when confronting the prospect of being sidelined in their children's lives.

**This is what Wisconsin voters overwhelmingly want. It's what more Wisconsin children deserve.**

Full survey results: <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/Charts%20-%20WFCF-NPO%20Wisconsin%20Shared%20Parenting%202020%20Weighted%20Report.pdf>

*Over 60 academic studies show shared co-parenting is what's best for the vast majority of WI children*



## DCF - HELPING BOTH PARENTS WITH SEPARATED FAMILIES

Wisconsin Dept. of Children and Families (DCF) has promoted some modifications to existing policies regarding child support obligations during the pandemic.

The federal legislation authorizing the first round of stimulus financial assistance payments (*\$1,200 per adult and \$600 per child*) required that those payments be subject to intercept by the IRS for child support arrears. By federal law, the interception of the stimulus checks was actually applied to state owed arrears, including birth costs first, meaning that a lesser amount actually went directly for the shared children. Certainly it is contentious as to whether the intent of the stimulus funding was to help people in duress during a pandemic with basic needs, or that it was just money that we wanted pushed into our economy. Regardless of the federal intent, the interception for child support debts resulted in a logistical nightmare for all state child support agencies. Plus there was a significant amount of spouses that had their portion of the tax refund intercepted and were forced to wait to have that amount released as it is not their responsibility to provide financial assistance for their other spouse's child support debts. WDCF was certainly against that action, and almost every other state child support agency felt that way too. The second round of stimulus checks (\$600) **did not** carry that federal mandate to intercept.

DCF also instituted a rule change during the pandemic regarding adding parents to the WI Child Support Lien docket. The rule was instituted shortly after the pandemic hit America to suspend the threshold used to add new parents to the lien docket, **assuming many payers will be economically in hardship due to the pandemic**. Being added to the Support Lien Docket carries a number of punitive measures that **immediately** go into effect. The rule suspension had a window of application that would have expired in November. WI legislators considered that rule modification and the reasoning behind it, and ultimately felt that the rule modification put an **undue burden** on the parent that received support payments and *their* household. The rule was subsequently suspended by our Wisconsin Legislature.

DCF had also promoted a rule change that helped accommodate low income unmarried fathers that were living with the other parent (mother) and children, in regards to birth cost recovery. The basic *ideal* was that because of cohabitation, the recovery of the birth costs would then remove funding that was used for the low income family as a whole. According to WI statutes half of the birth costs associated with uninsured low income mothers, are assigned as a financial obligation for the father. During the Legislative Study Committee hearings a representative of Milwaukee's Child Support Agency, testified that there is a sliding scale for Birth Cost obligations for lower income fathers that results in actual average adjusted obligations in the \$700 range. In Wisconsin the average birth cost is approximately \$11,000, half of which would be \$5,500 and a significantly higher amount than actual average adjusted obligations (\$700) that were required from low income fathers. **Certainly Child Support Agencies are considering fathers ability to pay**, and applying a significant progressive discount based on income ability in Birth Recovery Cost program. DCF's *ideal* regarding low income cohabitating parents and not requiring the Birth Cost Recovery obligation be assigned, was something that **WFCF** felt made strong sense as it relates **to the best interest of the children**. There was strong opposition to this DCF rule in the Legislative Study Committee, it appears based on the perceived high potential for misrepresenting living arrangements to avoid birth cost recovery obligations. WFCF voted to NOT to suspend the rule, but the majority in the Study Committee carried the vote to **suspend that rule**. (Note, the rule suspension required legislative approval and the bill was not passed so the rule remains in effect as promulgated by DCF.)

The bottom line is DCF works to incorporate the entire families' best interest into many of their actions. The entire family includes the **two** parents and the children. Certainly there are areas that need improvement in how DCF accomplishes their task of ultimately trying to insure the financial best interest is met, for children with separated parents. To clearly be able identify areas that need improvement in our child support system, we need to acknowledge the appropriate consideration to both parents that DCF incorporates into achieving their goal historically as well.

**Fatherlessness** in the entire US population of children now stands at **25%**

**18 million kids** have only one parent significantly involved in their lives. In 2009 it was calculated that **Fatherlessness costs taxpayers an estimated \$100 Billion dollars** a year in the US. <http://wisconsinfathers.org/100%20billion%20dollars.pdf>

There are multiple causes for this clearly undesirable situation: **fatherlessness**.

- Fathers don't step up and realize how important their significant involvement is in relation to their children's overall wellbeing.
- At times, mothers impede a father's involvement or don't *invite* that involvement to **fully** address, *their* shared children's best interest.
- Family Court inherently is a difficult course and can be extremely costly to navigate which leads **some** parents to disconnect unfortunately.
- The intrinsic value of shared parenting for children is overshadowed at times by the potential lifestyle gains for one parent, from a child support financial obligation on the other parent.

Identifying that **shared parenting is in a child's best interest in Wisconsin** will address many of the causes of fatherlessness and lead to a significant decrease in single involved parent situations, for WI's children with *separated parents*.

- It will let fathers know clearly that it is really important to be **significantly involved** with your kids
- It will let mothers know that it's in the **children's best interest** to have both parents significantly involved.
- In the Wisconsin counties that mandate it, co-parenting classes have led to a significant decrease in family court time required for cases to be completed. Identifying **shared parenting is best for kids** will have the similar effect. This saves the taxpayers a very significant amount of money that is spent on administering *our* family courts. It saves parents who are frequently *cash strapped* because of a separation, significant amounts of money spent on litigation - freeing that money for **child centric** use instead.
- The ultimate goal is to focus both parents on providing a shared parenting experience for their children. Achieving this goal also serves to substantially increase the likelihood of support obligations staying current as well as substantially decrease the weaponization of child support by either parent. Child support calculations then become what has been the intent – simply a **rational result** of an agreement between two parents sharing the responsibilities for nurturing their children.

The most recent data shows that about **40%** of the children in WI with separated parents are benefitting from both parents being involved in their lives. **50% of the kids in WI with divorced parents, and approximately 85% of kids with never married parents (that are separated) only have a significant relationship with one of their parents.** That statistic comes from an **IRP-UW Madison** study of **actual** placement outcomes in WI., Slightly over half of the divorced separated parents choose shared parenting, but unmarried parents actually make up over half the births in WI currently and shared parenting in those situations occurs only between 15-20% of the time. When those parents are separated. That puts **two thirds of the kids at a much higher risk of trouble**, compared to kids with **two parents involved** in their lives. <https://www.timetoputkidsfirst.org/why-children-need-shared-parenting>

Certainly in some situations shared parenting or shared placement is not the right choice, **as to** the best interest of those children. Geographical separation makes shared parenting difficult to administer or provide. Domestic Violence (DV) or child abuse are strong and important factors that need to be considered when determining whether shared parenting **can** be applied for some families. DV considerations are mentioned in our custody and placement statutes a multitude of times as factors that require strong consideration in custody and placement decisions by **the parents or the courts**, and they should be. The reason that consideration (*DV or abuse*) is mentioned so often, is we want parents and the courts to strongly take that safety issue in mind because we all know that

it is important. Currently our statutes iterate that it is in the best interest of children to have both parents **sharing joint custody**. Our current statutes (767) also states that **maximizing time** with both parents is in a child's best interest. That implies, *shared parenting* is in a child's best interest. Maximizing time **does not** set a specific amount of time, it leaves that decision up to the parents or the Courts to determine the exact amount of time that is the **maximum**. Each families individual **circumstances are used** to determine the exact **appropriate** amount of time. Shared Parenting and Shared Placement **will** carry the same directive as the word **maximize** currently does. The extent of shared parenting and shared placement is completely up to the **parents** and/or the **courts** to determine the exact amount of **placement time** is appropriate in each families situation.

We all know **shared parenting** (*when possible*) is absolutely the best for the overwhelming majority of kids. We want the **parents** and the **courts** to immediately and strongly consider that **shared parenting** is the best scenario for children if it is viable and safe.. **Parenting** is a very important responsibility. Parenting benefits **all** children significantly. Parenting benefits both parents. **Parenting involves BOTH parents.**

# Join Today ~ \$30 Lifetime Membership

## WFCF Lifetime Membership Application

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Date of Birth			Gender <small>(This data may be used in reporting membership population)</small>	Male	Female
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Mailing Address <small>(If Different than Physical Address)</small>					
City		State		Zip	
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Check Here to be Contacted about Volunteer Opportunities with WFCF					

Qty	Description	Unit Price	Extended Cost
1	WFCF Lifetime Membership ★ Includes E-Mail Subscription to "Todays Dad's Newsletter"	\$30.00	
	3 x 11 ½ in. Removable Vinyl WFCF "Kids NEED BOTH Parents" Bumper Sticker	\$3.00	
	1 ¼ in. WFCF Logo Lapel Pin	\$5.00	
1	One Time Donation to WFCF 501(c)(3) Not for Profit Organization		
<i>\$ Membership Fees and Donations are IRS Tax Deductible \$</i>		<b>Total</b>	

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**MONTHLY SEPARATED PARENT MEETINGS / TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED**

WFCF IS NOW OFFERING **120 MEETINGS** IN PERSON MEETINGS  
ACROSS THE STATE PER YEAR

**Milwaukee:**

4th Saturday of the month  
8 AM - 9:30 AM at:

**Milwaukee market**

400 Water St, Milw/ upstairs mezzanine

**Madison:**

Third Monday of the month  
6:15 PM at:

**World Buffet at South Town Mall**

2451 W Broadway, Monona, WI

**Fox Valley:**

Third Tuesday of the month  
6:30 PM at:

**El Jarpeo Mexican Restaurant**

1727 Freedom Rd, Little Chute, WI

**Central WI:**

Second Monday of the month  
7:30 PM at:

**Korner Kitchen**

4890 Hwy H, Edgar, WI

**NW WI (Eau Claire):**

Third Thursday of each month  
6:30 PM at:

**Taquera La Poblantia**

2436 London Rd, Eau Claire, WI



**Green Bay/NE WI:**

First Wednesday of the month  
6:30 PM at:

**Townline Pub**

2544 Lineville Rd, Green Bay, WI

**La Crosse:**

Second Thursday of the month  
6:30 PM at:

**Sheninigans**

2100 Dawson Ave, La Crosse, WI

**Janesville:**

Second Thursday of the month  
6 PM at:

**Denny's**

2020 Milton Ave, Janesville, WI

**Racine:**

Third Friday of the month  
7:30 PM at:

**Asian Buffet**

3701 Durand Ave, Racine, WI

**Fond du Lac:**

Second Monday of the month  
6:30 PM at:

**Schmitty's Oar House Bar and Grill**

N7044 Winnebago Dr, Fond du Lac, WI