



Pride of the Ojibwe

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January 12, 2026

Senator Jesse L. James, Chair
Room 319 South
State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Re: Support for Senate Bill 710

Dear Chair James:

We thank you and the Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families for allowing the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians (“LCO”) the opportunity to provide its support for Senate Bill 710. Currently, Wisconsin statutes only permit Wisconsin Shares (“WI Shares”) payments to be made to state-regulated child care providers. This Bill creates a statutory mechanism for tribal-regulated child care providers to also be able to accept WI Shares payments.

Child care is an absolute necessity in our community, as expressed by our citizens through our community needs assessment. In 2020, the *Lac Courte Oreilles Child Care Needs Survey* asked a variety of questions aimed at trying to figure out the best way to help the Tribal community. Of the 156 who answered the question about what services they would most like to have offered in the community, the highest response received was requesting a child care center, with a response of 43.59%. For those not working at the time and for those who wanted to continue with schooling, both stated the lack of child care was the biggest barrier for them. So, in the middle of the COVID pandemic, LCO began planning and building its Daycare Center.

We live in a rural area where the demand for child care is a lot higher than in non-rural areas. Our Genawendaawasong – LCO Daycare Center is one of the bigger facilities in our service area serving the needs of our working families. Quality child care is vital to our community because of the unique needs of our families within our community. We have a higher number of children in out-of-home placement, single-parent households, and extended families raising young children. Additionally, our children deserve quality care that incorporates our cultural values and teachings.

There are twenty-four (24) state-regulated tribal child care programs operating in Wisconsin, with a regulated capacity to serve more than 1,300 children. There are obviously many other programs and providers around the state that are not affiliated with a Tribal Nation; however,

they likewise provide care for tribal children. These programs are in dire need of support. While child care is struggling all over the state, our LCO Tribal community has been hit particularly hard. And we rely on every bit of financial support available to ensure we can continue to stay open to prepare our children for the future. This includes relying on the receipt of WI Shares from custodial caregivers. Thus, we have been unable to even consider whether transitioning to a tribal-regulated system makes sense for LCO, because of the potential financial loss of WI Shares under the current laws of the state.

We value the strong partnerships we have developed through the years with various state departments – one of which is the Department of Children and Families (“DCF”). During the Tribal-State Consultation process, a question was posed regarding whether a tribal-regulated child care facility could accept WI Shares. DCF researched and came back stating the statutory framework would not allow for WI Shares payments to be made to tribal-regulated facilities. It could have ended there, but this became a DCF Consultation action item. DCF continued with its research and analysis on what needed to occur for tribal-regulated child care providers to be able to accept WI Shares payments. Ultimately, Senate Bill 710 was the product of DCF’s work on a Consultation action item and thus an example of a ***successful*** Tribal-State Consultation process.

With the passage of Senate Bill 710, Tribes would be able to exert their Tribal sovereign authority to self-regulate their child care centers and not fear the loss of WI Shares. As part of our federal Tribal Child Care Development Fund (“CCDF”) plan funding, similar to the state, we are required to have appropriate regulatory systems in place that ensure the health and safety of our children, quality improvement, knowledgeable about child development and education, and that our providers are qualified. Bottom line, this is about Tribal sovereignty, and DCF recognizing that we have the authority to self-regulate our Tribal facilities within our Tribal communities.

We respectfully urge your support for Senate Bill 710. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake
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Tribal Governing Board

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