



February 3, 2026

Good Afternoon Chairman Tittl and Members of the Committee,

My name is Polly Thomas. I live in Wisconsin Rapids, and I oversee school partnerships at Cartwheel. Cartwheel is the nation's largest provider of telehealth mental health services for students and families, working in close partnership with schools.

I wanted to thank the committee, Representative Franklin and Senator James for bringing forward Assembly Bill 946, as it provides a lifeline to the youth in our state. We know too many families across Wisconsin are in need of mental health support, and wait lists are simply too long. Students and families are often stuck waiting up to 6 months for a provider. They also face barriers with insurance and transportation.

Cartwheel has stepped in to help fill this gap. We're a telehealth provider that brings quality mental health care to families when and where they need it, often through schools. Today, we work with 10 districts here in Wisconsin and over 350 school systems across the country.

Here's how it works: When a local school district signs up for Cartwheel, any family attending that district can access mental health support. They can either go directly to our website or talk to their school counselor to get a referral, with parental consent. Within a week, we will match them to a Wisconsin-licensed provider to start care via telehealth.

Here's how our model works:

- First, there is no waitlist, which means kids can get help right away instead of waiting.
- Second, we involve parents throughout the process, from initially providing consent to also meeting with the therapist to stay informed.
- Third, sessions mostly happen at home in the afternoons, evenings, or on weekends, which ensures a sense of privacy for families and also means they don't have to miss school or work.
- Fourth, we have research that proves our services not only improve mental health outcomes but also educational outcomes. After kids receive telehealth services through Cartwheel, they miss 10 fewer days of school and are 3x less likely to be suspended or expelled.
- Lastly, our services are cost-effective because we accept private insurance, Medicaid, and also support uninsured families.

I would urge you to consider a few changes to this bill to ensure that it creates a fair process for all providers who provide these types of services.

- 1) First, remove the requirement that the provider needs to have provided services in other states. We believe that an RFP process should allow for Wisconsin-based providers to apply, not just out-of-state providers.

- 2) Second, expand the bill to allow services to students from all grade levels. The bill limits services to high school students, but half of mental health issues start in middle school or even earlier. Early intervention is key.
- 3) Third, remove the requirement of having an “online peer chat space” or a “native mobile application”. Making these requirements would exclude almost all mental health providers from applying.
- 4) Fourth and finally, please ensure that any mental health care services are provided by clinicians licensed in Wisconsin.

I would be happy to work with the bill sponsors, committee members, other entities, and anyone else who is interested in making sure that Wisconsin schools have the resources they need to ensure their students can receive the mental healthcare they deserve.

Thank you for your time and I am glad to answer any questions you may have.

Polly Thomas

Partnerships Lead, Cartwheel (www.cartwheel.org)