

TESTIMONY BY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS,
WISCONSIN CHAPTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARC HERSTAND BEFORE
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AGING AND
LONG TERM CARE IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 128

My name is Marc Herstand. I have served as Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin Chapter for the past thirteen years. We represent over 2400 social workers throughout Wisconsin who work in outpatient mental health clinics, psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, schools, human service departments, non-profit agencies, hospitals, universities, businesses and other settings.

I am speaking today on behalf of both NASW WI and the Coalition for Fairness in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Insurance in support of Senate Bill 128.

There's a song on popular radio right now called "1985". It's about a woman whose kids are embarrassed by her because she is stuck in that particular year and wants everything to be the way it was back then. As a father of a 17 and 20 year old, I can understand this song! Although I am often nostalgic about the past-my past, it is irrelevant to my two sons whose lives are enormously different than individuals born in an earlier time. The past two decades have brought lots of changes, and one only needs to look back to 1985 to realize that.

In 1985, the Soviet Union still existed. E-mail did not exist. Ronald Reagan was our President and Madonna kicked off her first tour. In 1985 Rock Hudson died and in January 1985 Ashley Simpson was only two months old. On TV, "The Golden Girls", "MacGyver", and "Growing Pains" premiered while we said goodbye to "The Jeffersons" and "The Dukes of Hazzard".

Costs have also changed dramatically since 1985. As a father with two sons around college age, I yearn for 1985. In 1985 the tuition for one year at the University of Wisconsin, Madison was \$785.50 compared to \$6,284 today. The average home price in the United States was \$100,800 compared to \$183,500 today. A new Mustang convertible cost around \$12,000 in 1985 compared to \$27,000 today.

Looking at smaller expenses, as we are all cheese heads you might be interested in the fact that a pound of Cheddar in 1985 cost \$3.09 compared to \$4.27 today. A gallon of milk cost \$2.26 compared to \$3.20 today. A gallon of gas cost \$1.20 compared to our current price of \$2.38. Since we are talking about COLA's today, you should know that a two-liter bottle of Pepsi cost .89 in

1985 compared to \$1.50 today. Finally it cost 20 cents to mail a letter in 1985 compared to 37 cents today.

The current minimum amount that group health plans must cover for nervous and mental disorders and alcoholism and other drug abuse problems is \$7,000 and is based upon 1985 figures for the cost of 30 days of inpatient psychiatric care. Based upon figures I have received from three hospitals in the Madison and Milwaukee area, \$7,000 would cover about a week of care. You would actually need about \$33,000 to cover a month of care. Our bill only increases the amount of coverage by the federal cost of living for medical coverage, \$18,300, which as you can see does not cover the full increase in psychiatric hospitalization costs for at least Milwaukee and Madison.

A Wisconsin family with a member suffering from a mental illness or substance abuse would certainly wish they could turn the clock back to 1985, when perhaps their insurance would actually cover their costs of inpatient and outpatient care. Unfortunately they cannot turn the clock back and families are suffering because their insurance rates are based on costs of another era.

Please support this bill so that Wisconsin families can get the care they need to live productively in our state.

References:

Cheese prices: USDA Economic Research Service (www.ers.usda.gov)

Infoplease.com

Events, trends www.1980sflashback.com

Price of 1985 home, gas, stamp

Milk prices: Wisconsin Marketing Board

Mustang prices: TheMustangSource.com

Pepsi price: www.foodtimeline.org

The Food Timeline

Psychiatric hospital rates for 2005: Phone conversations with staff at Meriter Hospital in Madison, Rogers Memorial Hospital in Oconomowoc and Columbia St. Mary's Hospital in Milwaukee held on November 14, 2005

Tuition information: Madison Bursary's office via Ask Bucky, the email information and referral service of the Campus Information and Visitor (CIVC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

