



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor  
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

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October 8, 2021

Senator Patrick Testin  
Chair, Committee on Health and Human Services  
Room 131 South  
State Capitol, PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Testin:

I am pleased to submit to you, as required by Wis. Stat. § 253.115 (2), the annual report on the status of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS) in Wisconsin. In 2019, 100% of hospitals with birthing facilities and the majority of licensed homebirth providers continued to universally screen babies for hearing loss. Of the 63,280 Wisconsin births, 62,848 babies had newborn screening records in 2019, and 61,848 of those babies (98.4%) were screened for hearing loss. Families of 579 (0.9%) newborns refused hearing screening. Only 1.6% of infants were never screened. Infants were not screened for a variety of reasons, including infant death, moving out of state prior to screening, or screenings that are still pending. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that the refer rate — the percentage of infants who do not pass the inpatient hearing screening in one or both ears and require a referral for additional testing — be below 4.0%. In 2019, Wisconsin's refer rate was 2.9%.

Hearing loss is the most common congenital birth defect, affecting approximately 150 babies annually in Wisconsin. Left undetected and therefore untreated, hearing loss impedes speech, language, cognitive, and social development. The Wisconsin Sound Beginnings (WSB) Program continues to make progress toward meeting its goal of ensuring that hearing screening is available to 100% of babies born in Wisconsin and to ensure that appropriate services are provided to children who do not pass their hearing screens.

The WSB Program is improving all areas of early hearing detection and intervention through a variety of activities and working with its partners in other agencies to promote a sound beginning for Wisconsin's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen E. Timberlake".

Karen E. Timberlake  
Secretary-designee