



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

August 25, 2022

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

Dear Senator Testin:

The Department of Health Services is pleased to submit to you, as required by Wis. Stat. § 253.115, the annual report on the status of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS) in Wisconsin. In 2020, 100% of hospitals with birthing facilities and the majority of licensed homebirth providers continued to universally screen babies for hearing loss. Of the 60,615 Wisconsin births, 60,192 babies had newborn screening records in 2020, and 59,135 of those babies (98.2%) were screened for hearing loss. Families of 693 (1.2%) newborns refused hearing screening. 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%. For babies born in 2020, Wisconsin's refer rate was 2.8%.

Hearing loss is the most common congenital birth defect, affecting an approximately 150 babies annually in Wisconsin. Left undetected and 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