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Details: Public Hearing, 4/15/2009, re: AB 75

(FORM UPDATED: 08/11/2010)

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ... PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS

2009-10

(session year)

Senate

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on ... Children & Families & Workforce Development (SC-CFWD)

COMMITTEE NOTICES ...

- Committee Reports ... **CR**
- Executive Sessions ... **ES**
- Public Hearings ... **PH**

INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

- Appointments ... **Appt** (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
- Clearinghouse Rules ... **CRule** (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
- Hearing Records ... bills and resolutions (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
(**ab** = Assembly Bill) (**ar** = Assembly Resolution) (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
(**sb** = Senate Bill) (**sr** = Senate Resolution) (**sjr** = Senate Joint Resolution)
- Miscellaneous ... **Misc**



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April 15, 2009

Committee of Children and Families and
Workforce Development Wisconsin Legislature

Dear Members:

Thank you for your special hearing on the impact of the state budget on families and children in the State of Wisconsin. I regret that I could not be with you today due to other commitments in La Crosse. I would like to provide some written testimony on the potential impact of the Governor's budget on core services to vulnerable children and families in the state.

There is no other part of county government that is faced with more funding cuts than in the context of county human services. As you know, the State of Wisconsin is only one of ten to fifteen states in which the majority of mandated human services fall on counties to provide and largely to fund out of local property taxes. Funding from the state out of the Basic County Allocation (BCA) has been capped for almost twenty years. During this time, counties have seen rising demand for services, increased federal and state mandates for how services are provided, and inflationary costs associated with these services. In addition to this, counties are faced with their third year of caps on local property taxes. Within the Governor's budget, counties are faced with a minimum of a \$75 million cut on essential services primarily impacting families and children. Most of these cuts come from Economic Support programs and child welfare and juvenile justice services.

In La Crosse County, we have seen a significant increase in the number of referrals to our Economic Support Section within the last few months. At the current growth rate with caseloads, if we project to the end of the year, we would have had the same increase in new referrals in one year that we had in the last five. We are projecting that this is likely to get worse as the recession continues to hit Western Wisconsin. Our Workforce Development Director indicated last week that since the recession started we have seen 40,000 jobs lost in Western Wisconsin. The Job Center that averaged 1,000 referrals each month prior to the recession now averages over 2,000 each month. We are beginning to see families referred into child protection due to the impact of the recession and the stress caused on family systems.

Committee of Children and Families and
Workforce Development Wisconsin Legislature

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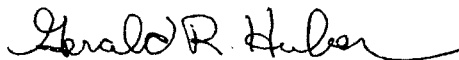
April 15, 2009

With the current Governor's budget, the county will be forced to lay off numerous workers both in Economic Support and in Child Welfare. We strongly feel these areas deserve the Governor and legislature's attention as much as K to 12 education and extension of health care and Badger Care. If the economy is going to bounce back, there is a need for strong families and an infrastructure of supports that help families in times of critical economic need. The very fabric of the Wisconsin Works program is likely to be compromised with the current recession if there are not jobs to refer recipients to.

Close to 75% of La Crosse County Human Services budget is devoted to families and children in need. Many of the programs we provide fall into state and federal mandates in which we can only accomplish through the use of a combination of state, federal, and local funding. We strongly urge your committees to maintain this partnership with the state to allow counties the opportunity to continue to make sure Wisconsin children are safe and Wisconsin families have the resources they need to support themselves and offer nurturing environments for their children to thrive.

Thank you for your support to families and children in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,



Gerald R. Huber, Director
La Crosse County Human Services Department

GRH/rew



Testimony before the WI Senate Children, Families and Workforce
Development Committee
4-15-09

My name is Steve Blake and I am the president of Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families (WFCF). I would like to open my testimony with a question. What is more important, love or money?

The reason I pose this question is because the state seems very anxious to make sure that it can wring the maximum amount of money out of non-custodial fathers by enforcing child support orders but it is indifferent when it comes to enforcing placement orders. Why is that pertinent? Because studies clearly indicate that the more time a father spends with his children the more likely he is to pay child support, spend additional money on his kids, and contribute to their college educations.^{1, 2}

In fact, according to a US Census report titled *Custodial mothers, fathers & child support, 2005*: The proportion of custodial parents with custody or visitation arrangements who received any child support ranged from 77.6 percent for those with visitation-only arrangements to 84.6 percent for those having both joint custody and visitation arrangements. Of the custodial parents due child support who did not have either joint custody or visitation arrangements, 61.5 percent received child support payments.³

Failure to pay child support can result in wage withholding, tax refund interception, property liens, driver's license revocation and other penalties including jail, which is the only example of a debtors prison that is allowed in this country. Failure to abide by a placement order usually results in a shrug of the shoulders and official indifference. I offer two examples, both from Columbia county but I have heard similar stories from across the state:

The first is taken from our WFCF Yahoo group and was just posted this past Monday. Both men are members of WFCF.

Bob D. has had equal placement and cannot get anyone to assist him in enforcing the Court Order. His daughter hasn't spent a night with him since October 2007. He's tried nearly every legal avenue there is. The sheriff's department refuses to enforce the court orders and the system just stonewalls.

walls him. Short of going over to his daughter's mother's home and physically carrying his 14 year old daughter to his home Bob has tried everything. He tried to schedule a contempt of court action but the judge said he wasn't going to schedule one until the parties had psych. evaluations. All Bob can do is appeal but his attorney doesn't think they should anger the judge.

I have been personally involved as an advocate in this case.

Mike O. had his children snatched off the street in front of his home over 6 years ago by the mother and her new boyfriend who took them to Minnesota. The sheriff, the police and the county attorney all refused to get involved. He had to go to court in a John Doe hearing where the judge found that there was enough evidence to believe that a crime had been committed and ordered the Columbia county attorney to investigate. After months of delay she finally turned the case over to the Portage police who simply asked mom if she had done what the father alleged. Mom denied it. End of investigation. Mike has since been back to court and the judge has appointed a special prosecutor. That was 8 months ago. There is still no resolution and Mike's kids are growing up without him.

But both of these men damn well better pay their child support or face sanctions imposed by the state. I can explain 'till the cows come home that placement and child support are two separate issues but is it any wonder that some fathers resent paying for the privilege of not seeing their children?

WFCF represents responsible men who desperately want to provide all the love and support that children need. Moral, emotional, and financial. I am the first to admit that there are far too many men who, when getting divorced are willing to say, "you take the kids and I'll take the truck". Men who have 5 children by 3 different women whom they have never bothered to marry get little sympathy from us.

But, the overwhelmingly majority of divorced fathers want more time with their children & more shared parenting. If this committee seriously wants to improve lives of children in this state then you should consider how to encourage and facilitate father involvement not just father payment. If you want to increase compliance with child support orders then you should increase compliance with placement orders and encourage equal placement

between parents.

Cynics will say that the state is really only interested in increasing its share of federal funds available to child support enforcement agencies. The more child support collected the more money the state gets from the feds. I don't believe that. I have met with people who work for child support agencies. Lisa Marks from Milwaukee is one and I believe that most of them are genuinely concerned with the well being of children. I believe that the members of this committee are honestly committed to see that the children of Wisconsin have the best possible opportunity to grow up well and thrive.

While the recommendations I have suggested will by no means solve all the challenges you are grappling with, I believe that you could significantly increase the quality of life for many Wisconsin children by acknowledging the fact that most parents, men and women, want what is best for their children. Those fathers who no longer live with their children's mother, for the most part, would be dedicated to providing the full range of support their children need if the state would just get out of the way and respect children's rights to have both parents equally involved in their lives regardless of marital status.

1. Wallerstein & Blakeslee *What about the kids?* 2004.
2. Fabricus & Braver. Divorced parents financial support of college expenses, *Family Court Review*, 2003
3. *Custodial mothers, fathers & child support: 2005*. Population Characteristics
4. Nielsen, L. Demeaning, demoralizing & disenfranchising divorced dads. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 1999.
5. Warshak, R. *Divorce Poison*, 2002



Senate Committee on Children and Families and Workforce Development
Department of Children and Families Budget Public Hearing
Sen. Jauch Testimony
April 15, 2009

Thank you for being here today to discuss the programs that support the needs of our children and families here in Wisconsin. We are all here because we care that our families are provided the best resources possible to meet their family and financial obligations in increasingly complex times and most importantly, to keep children safe.

While we may be able to agree on the needs, it is important to remember that we are living in extraordinary circumstances. This economic crisis will stress us unlike any other time. While the demands for services will keep rising, the money available will not. Therefore, we cannot expect that all needs will be met.

The Legislature has continually supported the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program and has made it whole when it has fallen short. However, we cannot continue to fill a well that has gone dry. This program is vitally important to working families who cannot afford child care on their own, but we simply may not be able to fully fund the program without cost-saving measures. While there may be concern about proposed cost-savings, some will be necessary. The Administration has heard concerns and in particular worked to modify the attendance-based policy so that it creates less of a burden on the child care provider.

In addition, Community Aids, which allow counties to provide important social services, are facing large reductions that simply cannot be fully addressed with state dollars.

We must work together to find new and creative solutions that may help to make these cuts less onerous. There will still be pain and we must prepare ourselves for the reality of the situation. Sacrifices will have to be made and not all needs will be met. But a frank and open discussion of the concerns will help us understand how we can weather this crisis and still make an investment in our family's futures.





Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development
Community Development Division
Office of Community Services

Email: commserv@cityofmadison.com

Testimony for Public Hearing
Committee on Children and Families and Workforce Development
April 15, 2009
Jolene Ibeling, Child Care Coordinator

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We know that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 invests in early care and education and creates incentives and supports for states to build comprehensive, coordinated, high-quality early childhood systems. The Budget invests resources to encourage state *and* local investment in early childhood education; support coordination among *local*, state, and federal partners and a seamless delivery of services; and provide better information to parents about program options and quality.

We all benefit from and appreciate investments in children, families and early care and education. The City of Madison supports State efforts to:

- Increase access to high quality care for all children
- Create a quality rating system that helps inform decision-making for parents and provides resources to programs to meet quality standards
- Expand 4K using a community collaborative approach

The City of Madison supports quality early childhood care and education and assistance to needy families with a budget of \$2, 382,309 annually in child care assistance, grants and services. If local municipalities were able to draw down matching funds for early childhood care and education initiatives that demonstrate best practice in targeting low-income families and support for quality improvement, families like those in Madison, would be less likely to revolve in and out of the Wisconsin Shares system. Even when parents are able to increase their earnings or advance their careers, they find themselves unable to afford child care and therefore, quit their jobs, choose part-time employment or decline advancement in order to maintain the needed level of child care assistance. The City of Madison provides to you an example of a local municipality that has the capacity to match and strengthen federal/state funding and that holds a promise of long-term investments at the local level.

The City of Madison is concerned about the proposals outlined in the budget to contain the costs of Wisconsin Shares and limit fraud. Faced with a reduction in income, child care businesses will need to make financial decisions that will have implications for *all* children and families. These include:

- Eliminating/reducing jobs
- Reducing wages
- Eliminating/reducing quality
- Closing the center
- Decreasing equipment purchases
- Delaying facility repairs/improvements
- Reducing professional development opportunities
- Reducing transportation options
- Increasing child/staff ratios
- Eliminating/reducing subsidized slots

Although there is extensive, longitudinal research (HighScope Perry Preschool Study & The Abecedarian Project) on the economic returns from investments in quality early care and education, particularly for low-income children, Wisconsin Shares regionalization rates puts Madison's low-

income families and the programs that serve them at a disadvantage. With Madison's artificially lowered reimbursement rates but high cost of quality care, parents in the Wisconsin Shares program are finding it increasingly difficult to keep their children in accredited high quality child care. In the meantime, Accredited City of Madison programs serving low-income Wisconsin Shares families are suffering the financial consequences. During a 9-month period in 2008, 22 Madison Accredited child care centers reported a deficit of \$62,650, while 19 Madison Accredited family child care providers a loss of \$49,101, due to unpaid co-payments and or lapses or gaps in Wisconsin Shares authorizations and payments.

The City of Madison recognizes the importance of continuity of care for children and a strong, financially sound early care and education infrastructure. As such the City allocates \$40,000 in stabilization funding annually to programs so low-income Wisconsin Shares families can obtain and maintain high quality care for their children. Equally concerning is that Madison Accredited providers reported spending 10-30 hours a month administering and/or troubleshooting issues with Wisconsin Shares authorizations, attendance and other forms, and payments (*dependent upon number of Wisconsin Shares families enrolled*).

In addition to the implications for children, families and programs, the policies proposed by the Governor may result in additional and more costly demands on our community's social service agencies/intervention services, police, public education, as well as state workforce development services later in life. We recognize how difficult the State's financial picture currently is. We urge you to please work with other members of the Legislature, the Department of Children and Families and the early care and education community to find solutions that support access to *high quality* care and education for *all* children and that provides quality improvement resources to programs. Investments we fail to make in early care and education will be paid for in the form of more costly services for these children later in life.



**TESTIMONY TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
ON BUDGET ISSUES**

by Jeffrey Spitzer-Resnick

Managing Attorney

April 15, 2009

As a Managing Attorney for the Schools and Civil Rights team at Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), I focus on special education issues as well as civil rights issues, including the access of children with disabilities to early care and education. As such, below you will find the testimony which I submitted to the Joint Finance Committee last month on the Early Care and Education issues in the budget as they pertain to children with disabilities.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

DRW is a member of the Early Learning Coalition, a statewide coalition of key stakeholders from both the childcare community and the education community, who have formed this coalition in an effort to improve early care and education for children from birth-5 years old. DRW's interest in this coalition stems from the fact that many children with disabilities are not welcome in many child care settings, and/or do not have 4 year old kindergarten available to them. The reasons for these problems are varied, but include the fact that many child care settings do not have sufficient training and expertise to provide quality care for children with disabilities. Regarding 4 year old kindergarten, many school districts cannot afford to start these programs due to revenue caps and the impact of the 3 year rolling average, and limited reimbursement provided to school district for 4K programs. As a result, many 4 year olds with disabilities have no opportunities to be educated in an inclusive program with their non-disabled peers.

As you may be aware, the Early Learning Coalition is taking two key positions on the Governor's budget proposal, which DRW supports:

1. Fully Fund Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program

Wisconsin Shares is an essential program to help low-income families, including those with disabilities, and those that have children with disabilities, work with the assurance that their children are well cared for and being prepared for school. The child care subsidy program is a cornerstone of Wisconsin's welfare reform program. We support full funding of this program, without cutbacks in eligibility, co-payments, and payment rates, or the establishment of waiting lists. The Governor's budget proposes negative changes in every one of those policies that are unacceptable, resulting in a budget that is substantially short of what would sustain the program with current policies intact.

2. **Support Efforts to Increase High-Quality Early Learning for Kids**

Wisconsin should take initial steps towards a systematic approach to improving the quality of our early learning settings, helping all children to have a foundation for success in school and beyond, regardless of family income. Investing in early learning is a good investment. As such, DRW supports the Early Learning Coalition's recommendations which follow:

- **Quality Rating System:** The Coalition supports the Governor's Quality Rating System proposal, but believes it needs to be enhanced by making an investment in a statewide technical assistance system as well as incentives to help child care programs meet the needs of children through high quality early learning experiences, including a focus on children with disabilities served in early care and education settings and on children from disadvantaged backgrounds (this technical assistance proposal would add only \$3 million to the Governor's proposed budget, which may be available from the federal stimulus package).
- **Expand 4K:** The Coalition supports the Governor's proposal for start-up funding for 4K, with preference for community approaches to 4K delivery (\$1 million in each year of the biennium). As stated previously, these changes to funding 4K will greatly increase the likelihood that children with disabilities will be able to be educated with their non-disabled peers when they are 4 years old.

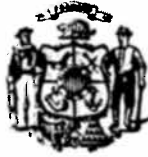
The Early Learning Coalition believes that a sound, fair subsidy program and efforts to improve quality are highly related. Both affect the access of Wisconsin's children to high-quality early learning, with a particular emphasis on children from disadvantaged settings who are most at-risk of school failure. As mentioned above, DRW, as a member of the Early Learning Coalition wholeheartedly supports these laudable proposals.

As always, feel free to contact me during your budget deliberations if you have any questions or wish to discuss these proposals.



Jim Doyle
Governor

Reggie Bicha
Secretary



State of Wisconsin
Department of Children and Families

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April 15, 2009

TO: Committee on Children and Families

FROM: Reggie Bicha
Secretary, Department of Children and Families

RE: Budget Bill and Its Impact on Children and Families in Wisconsin

Acknowledgements:

- ◆ Senator Jauch for inviting you to speak this morning.

Good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to present Governor Doyle's budget proposal for the Department of Children and Families.

Members of this committee are well aware of the economic conditions facing our nation and our state. Every day it seems there are more headlines about companies cutting jobs and stock prices falling. We also know that when the economy declines, children disproportionately feel the painful effects.

States across the country have slashed funding for education, child care and child welfare. In fact, Arizona child protective services agencies laid off more than 150 case workers who investigate complaints of child abuse!

In uncertain times we must protect what we are certain is most important. One of the core values we hold in our state is protecting, supporting, and investing in our kids.

Governor Doyle faced difficult decisions when creating his budget proposal. He had to make cuts across state government. Yet even though we are facing a nearly \$5.9 billion deficit, Governor Doyle's budget continues his commitment to put children and families first.

Under the Governor's leadership, Wisconsin has made many advances to improve the health and safety of our children.

- We expanded 4-year-old kindergarten across the state.
- We established the Wisconsin Covenant to assure that any child who works hard, plays by the rules, and wants to continue their education beyond high school can do so.
- We launched BadgerCare Plus, ensuring that every child in this state has access to health insurance.

Last year, Governor Doyle took his commitment to children and families to a new level by creating the Department of Children and Families. For the first time in the state's history, we have a cabinet-level agency whose mission is to promote the social and economic well-being of Wisconsin's children and families.

As a new department, the Governor charged us with the assignment to refocus, retool and reprioritize state programs to address the needs of families of the 21st century. We are delivering on what Governor Doyle wants us to be—a dynamic agency dedicated to improving access to programs, streamlining bureaucracy and focusing on accountability and results for kids and families.

To advance this mission, Governor Doyle specifically included in his budget strategies to:

- Ensure that children are nurtured and safe from abuse and neglect
- Provide more families with access to high-quality early care and education and
- Make sure that parents have the right supports at the right times to provide for their kids.

Ensuring that children are nurtured and safe from abuse and neglect

This budget provides \$44.6 million over the biennium for out-of-home care expenditures in the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare to address growing out-of-home care needs, the need for higher levels of care, and to compensate for previous Congressional acts that resulted in significant reductions in the federal governments support for children in foster care.

The Governor's budget will also improve the state's ability to respond to instances of child abuse and neglect in Milwaukee County. Governor Doyle will provide \$5.3 million over the biennium to maintain and enhance a highly trained, professional workforce dedicated to ensuring quality care and services for children.

- The budget will create an additional 18 FTE positions for BMCW. This will enable the bureau to reduce caseloads for staff who conduct initial assessments and juvenile court intake.
- Governor Doyle has set aside \$1.2 million in the next biennium to add nurses to our case management program. Nurses will visit children younger than three years of age as well as children identified as medically fragile who are living in out-of-home care. Their visits and case consultation will supplement care already provided by case managers.

The budget will also address staff turnover issues by implementing a career ladder structure for contracted case managers that will increase the salaries of high-performing case managers and provide incentives for experienced and higher educated professionals that stay in direct practice.

Today in Wisconsin there are more than 7,300 children living in out-of-home care and there are approximately 4,500 foster homes.

There is a continuous need for additional foster families to provide safe, loving homes for all children requiring out-of-home care in Wisconsin. There is a particular need for foster families that are willing and able to provide care for sibling groups, teens, infants and children with special needs. Governor Doyle is committed to making a major investment in foster and other out-of-home care services throughout the state.

His proposed budget will increase foster parent payment rates by five percent in each year of the biennium, and will provide \$1.1 million over the biennium for a statewide foster parent training program. Wisconsin is currently one of only seven states without a statewide foster parent training program. Uniform curriculum and training across Wisconsin would ensure that all foster parents receive the information and supports they need to provide for the kids in their care.

Governor Doyle's budget provides \$1.8 million over the biennium to implement a graduated foster care licensing system that matches the needs of children with the skills of foster parents. This initiative will enable us to license relative caregivers, making the state eligible for up to \$13 million more in federal child welfare funds annually, while improving the quality and consistency of care for children across the state.

The Governor has made additional resources available to aid in the recruitment and retention of foster parents.

His budget also calls for regulation of rates in treatment foster care, group homes and residential care centers to better match the payment level of care to the care received. Treatment Foster Care administrative rates, group home and residential care rates have increased on average five percent each year for the last 20 years. Under the Governor's

proposal, we will conduct an actuarial study to determine a more reliable reimbursement policy to make certain that we maintain quality services while managing costs.

Ensuring that families have access to high quality early care and education

The Wisconsin Shares program is a valuable resource for thousands of families that rely on affordable child care to maintain their employment. Currently, more than 60,000 children in nearly 34,000 families across the state receive child care through the Shares program.

Despite the success of Wisconsin Shares, the program is not without its challenges. Increasing enrollments, an inability to rate and advance quality and the presence of fraud represent the three main challenges we face.

Governor Doyle provides solutions to these challenges in his budget. We must eliminate fraud, reduce error rates, get rid of waste and realign program incentives to achieve the outcomes we want in the Wisconsin Shares program.

- The Governor called for the creation of a Child Care Program Integrity Unit which will improve oversight and management of the Wisconsin Shares program.
- Governor Doyle also proposed the creation of an automated attendance system that would track attendance and reduce errors or inaccurate reporting.
- Additionally, the budget authorizes DCF to implement an attendance-based child care provider reimbursement system,

These changes are expected to maintain the state's annual cost of child care subsidies at the fiscal year 08-09 levels in the 09-11 biennium.

One initiative in particular I would like to highlight in a bit more detail is the attendance-based reimbursement system.

Under current policy, reimbursements are either enrollment-based or attendance-based. If provider reimbursement is based on attendance, they are paid only for the hours a child attends care. A provider reimbursed on an enrollment-based reimbursement system is paid for a pre-determined number of hours each week, whether or not the child is in attendance all of those hours.

Therefore, under our current enrollment-based system, we could potentially be paying providers for 40 hours of child care when they're actually only providing 12. Clearly this is not a responsible means of using taxpayer dollars.

At the same time, we know that child care providers have fixed costs they have to pay. Whether a child is present or absent, a set number of instructors must be on site. Whether

a child is present or absent, providers still have to prepare snacks and meals. Whether a child is present or absent, there are still bills to pay. These costs do not disappear.

We also know child care centers, like other businesses, have to manage cash flow and resources. If a child receives 20 hours of subsidized care one week, ten the next, and 40 the next, providers might be crunching numbers or playing a guessing game to determine the reimbursement they will receive.

Our new "hybrid" system would reimburse all providers based on the average number of hours a child attended in the last four-week period.

This structure will provide a more efficient use of taxpayer dollars than the current enrollment-based system and a more realistic approach than our rarely used attendance-based option now in place. It will allow providers to more easily predict reimbursements than a purely attendance-based system especially during weeks when attendance may be sporadic. It will be easy for parents and less burdensome to county agencies and W-2 providers who currently determine eligibility and authorize hours of care.

In addition to retooling the Wisconsin Shares program, Governor Doyle's budget also reflects his commitment to enhancing the quality of early care and education.

- The budget allocates \$2.8 million to develop and implement a child care quality rating system. This valuable tool will evaluate the quality of child care centers and give parents the tools they need to select the best available provider for their children.
- By recognizing high-quality child care centers with high rankings and providing technical assistance and training dollars to low-quality centers, we will create a tide that will help raise all boats. Overall, we will increase focus on high-quality centers and their practices and encourage low-quality centers to improve their policies, capacity and performance.

Helping parents provide for their families

In addition to protecting children in out-of-home care, investing in foster care and improving access to high-quality child care, the Governor's budget helps all parents provide for their families.

The budget allocates \$1 million for Emergency Assistance in the 2010 fiscal year. This is in addition to the \$1 million in Emergency Assistance passed in the budget repair bill.

Governor Doyle's W-2 proposals include more than \$2 million over the biennium to extend to 26 weeks benefits for mothers to care for their newborn infants.

Additionally, the budget allocates \$1.4 million over the biennium to provide supports for unmarried pregnant women who are in the third trimester of a medically high risk pregnancy that renders them unable to participate in the workforce.

Finally, by streamlining W-2 statutes, the Governor's budget proposal will help parents get out into the workforce earlier by removing barriers that previously held them back.

One of the main areas where we saw an opportunity to provide more clarity and remove unnecessary bureaucracy was through simplifying time clocks.

- Under this budget proposal, we are not deviating from the goal of time limited benefits, but rather we are simplifying the process and matching the state "clock" with the federal "clock". The goal of both the federal and state 60-month time limits is to motivate W-2 participants to obtain employment as quickly as possible and to do so by creating a sense of urgency. This goal will not change.

Training and Education Hours

- With the current economic situation, the Department is seeing many W-2 participants with very different needs—needs that require more individuality than what is currently allowed for training or education hours. For example, a person who has a strong educational background, but lacks work experience, job search experience and the soft skills necessary to get and sustain employment, may only participate in these essential training activities between 10 and 12 hours a week.
- The proposed budget will remove some of the hourly constraints and allow participants to spend more time on activities that serve their particular needs.
- We will still ensure that there is an appropriate blend of both work activities and education or training for W-2 participants, but the changes will better enable us to help parents obtain meaningful employment as quickly as possible.

As Governor Doyle has often said, the best social program we can provide for Wisconsin parents is a good paying job. Economic security is central to the well-being of a family, and these W-2 changes will help more Wisconsin families take that first step toward a better life.

Overall, the budget demonstrates the Governor Doyle's continued commitment to invest in Wisconsin's future by investing in children and families. He has placed the kids in the state of Wisconsin among his highest priorities. With the national economy slowing so dramatically, families across our state are struggling. The Governor's budget proposal moves us forward through streamlined programs, reduced administrative costs, increased

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access for families, and realigned incentives to deliver children and their caregivers the assistance they need. My staff and I look forward to implementing these initiatives as we work to protect children, strengthen families and build communities.

Thank you.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Children and Families
and Workforce Development

FROM: Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Senior Legislative Associate *SKD*

DATE: April 15, 2009

SUBJECT: Impact of State Budget on Children and Families

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) commends Senator Jauch and committee members for holding a public hearing on the state budget bill and its impact on children and families in Wisconsin. As I will be in and out of the committee all morning due to previous commitments, I am submitting written testimony for your consideration.

Ever since the Governor introduced his budget proposal, counties have been expressing concern about the impact cuts (or cost shifts) will have on the ability of counties to provide safety net services to children and families. We understand the budget difficulties the state of Wisconsin, and many other states across the nation, are experiencing and realize we need to be good partners as the state works through its fiscal crisis. That is why you will not hear counties discuss the one percent cuts we are facing in most, if not all, of our state aid programs. What you will hear us talk about, however, are the cuts (or cost shifts) proposed in the Governor's budget that are greater than one percent and affect our ability to ensure the safety and stability of children and families throughout Wisconsin.

The cuts proposed in the Governor's budget which affect our ability to provide safety net services include:

PROGRAM	2009-2011 FUNDING CUT/SHIFT
Children and Families BCA	\$20.6 million
Youth Aids	\$11.8 million
JCI Rate Increase	\$2 million
Income Maintenance	\$11 million
Mental Health Placements	\$13.7 million
TOTAL	\$59.1 million

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Note: Total human services cuts are actually greater than the amount listed above. Many 1% cuts have not been accounted for, as well as the \$15 million taken from county nursing homes under the certified public expenditure (CPE) program.

You will hear from county human services directors today the impacts these cuts will have on their day to day operations. Attached to this testimony you will find an unedited version of an article written for inclusion in the May issue of *Wisconsin Counties* detailing county concerns about the proposed cuts to vital human services programs. The quotes contained in the article come from surveys of human services departments statewide on the impacts the proposed cuts will have on county programs and services. County workers describe much better than I the effects the budget will have on children and families in this state.

Thank you once again for holding this public hearing. Please do not hesitate to contact me at the WCA office if you have any questions.

Safety Net Services at Risk in State Budget

By: Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf

County governments are responsible for providing the most basic services to Wisconsin residents in need – food, housing, medical care. The state requires counties to perform eligibility determinations for the FoodShare, Medical Assistance, BadgerCare, Emergency Assistance and Child Care programs. In addition, counties provide services to abused and neglected children and their families, work with juveniles in trouble with the law or at risk of offending and provide mental health services to children and adults.

With the national and state economies trying to recover from a downward spiral, more and more families are in need of safety net services. Counties are reporting dramatic increases in FoodShare and Medical Assistance applications, as well as increased reports of abuse, neglect and juvenile delinquency. In tough economic times, business at county human services departments increases.

There is also a change in the type of client seeking safety net services from counties. A large share of the increased caseload is first-time applicants – our friends and neighbors who have recently lost their jobs due to changing economic conditions. Their expectations are different as well – they expect service and expect that service quickly. The state does not provide sufficient funding to counties to provide safety net services. Unfortunately, the Governor's budget proposal significantly cuts funding for services provided to vulnerable children and families, or as one human services official put it - "The budget makes the safety net look more like a basketball net."

Income Maintenance and the State Budget

Imagine you are a county human services director and the following message is left on your voice mail:

I applied for FoodShare two days ago and left my verifications at your front desk yesterday, but I still have not received my benefits. I have left several messages for my worker and she has not returned any of my calls. My worker is blowing me off and I want a new one.

Unfortunately, such messages like this are being received in counties across the state every day. Under existing funding levels, it currently takes three to four weeks, on average, to see an economic support specialist and about a week for an applicant/beneficiary to get a phone call returned. Why? Based on an informal survey of county human services directors, caseload growth over the past six months for income maintenance programs has increased, in some cases, over 18 percent. Rock County, hit especially hard with the closing of the GM plant and related businesses, has experienced a caseload growth of 992 cases from November 1, 2008 through March 30, 2009. In addition, by the state's own measure, counties should be receiving \$90 million annually to process applications for economic support programs; however, current state funding equals \$52 million.

The Governor's budget cuts the Income Maintenance Administration Allocation (IMAA) by 1 percent, beginning in CY 10. The Governor's budget does not include new funding to continue the \$4.1 million supplemental payment. As a result, total funding for income maintenance contracts will decrease by \$5.5 million annually.

The IMAA funds county staff who process applications for FoodShare, Medical Assistance, Child Care and BadgerCare. With the state's jobless rate increasing, counties are seeing the largest increases in history in the number of families seeking assistance. There is no indication the increased demand will lessen over the next two years. Caseloads for county workers are already beyond acceptable levels, which will likely result in more errors, such as denying benefits to families who qualify for services and families not receiving service in a timely manner. Under the current funding scenario, counties are having trouble meeting federal and state guidelines for processing applications. With a funding cut, counties will surely violate the conditions of their state contracts, forcing families in crisis to wait for services, in addition to sanctions from the federal government. The current three to four week wait to see an economic support specialist will increase, placing families at risk.

Children and Family Aids and the State Budget

What will the proposed budget cuts mean to child welfare? Listen to what county officials have to say.

These cuts will eliminate our ability to provide any intervention services.

County government will not be able to meet DCFS Practice Standards.

More children will witness incidents of domestic violence between their caretakers.

This will increase the number of out-of-home placements.

The Governor's budget decreases the Children and Families Basic County Allocation (BCA) by \$20 million over the next two years. Counties use the Children and Families BCA to fund prevention services to children who are at risk of abuse or neglect; child protective services; child abuse and neglect investigations; out-of-home placements for children at risk; child welfare services to families; services to children at risk of becoming delinquent. The loss of funding used for critical child welfare services place children and families at risk.

Another county official has this to say about the impact of the cuts:

With the loss of staff comes increased caseloads in our child welfare programs. This will mean fewer visits from staff in their natural environments, more citations versus services, and decreased ability to respond immediately when a caretaker is under an undue amount of stress. Ultimately, we need to take action to protect the safety of the children in question, so out-of-home placements will occur more frequently because when

a child is placed in a licensed facility, we can ensure safety better than we can if the child remains in the home under the amount of stress that these families are facing. We will have fewer dollars to spend on counseling and education of parents/caretakers. Additionally, we will not be able to provide respite for families that just need a short break from the pressure but can keep their children at home if they get a break once in a while.

In short, the cuts mean more children will be taken from their homes because there are no providers to check up on them. This means more broken families and more families under stress.

Youth Aids and the State Budget

The state provides youth aids funding to counties to fund juvenile delinquency-related services; non-residential community-based services for juveniles and out-of-home placements. The Governor's budget cuts youth aids payments to counties by \$11.8 million, while increases charges to counties for juveniles ordered to a juvenile correctional facility by \$2 million.

Due to the weak economy, counties are seeing an increase in the number of children and families referred to county programming and an increased demand for local services. Unfortunately, the proposed cuts will impact the ability of counties to respond to reports of delinquency.

Counties across the state tell us what these cuts would mean:

In addition to program and service waitlists and a decreased ability to manage public safety (recidivism), we would anticipate an increase in the use of state correctional programs and out-of-home placements, since a lack of available alternatives generally results in more commitments and longer lengths of stay. These services are far less cost effective, are a return to traditional approaches that have less than desirable outcomes, and create a cycle of long-term investment that only exacerbates the funding challenges.

We are also concerned that community safety will be negatively impacted with less staff time and contracted community-based services to provide services to youth at risk of delinquent behavior.

One county official sums it up:

Years of progress stand to be erased, returning the community system to an ineffective juvenile probation and placement model. This would be a shameful outcome.

Mental Health Charges and the State Budget

Here is what counties say about the proposed cost shift:

This cost shift will reduce community services.

We will see an increase in emergency placements and hospitalizations.

Resources will be diverted from community-based services.

Irreparable harm will be done to the mental health system in general.

The Governor's 2009-2011 state budget requires counties to contribute the non-federal share of costs for children and elderly civil patients placed at one of the state's mental health institutes, a \$13.7 million cost shift over the next two years from the state to county property taxpayers.

Although this budget proposal has been described as an incentive to counties to use community-based mental health services, counties report that funding currently used for community-based mental health services will be diverted to funding placements in Winnebago and Mendota.

Unfortunately, Wisconsin has a shortage of community-based mental health providers. The Department of Health Services has contracted with a firm to study Wisconsin's mental health system and make recommendations on how to improve services statewide. This proposal is ill-timed and should be removed from the budget bill until the study is complete, allowing counties and the state to fully engage in discussions on the provision of mental health services into the future.

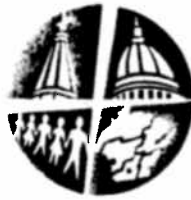
Conclusion

As you can see, the state budget will have devastating impacts on safety net services statewide. The dismantling of county human services has been years in the making, with the state failing to provide even basic inflationary increases year after year after year.

Again, our counties sum it up the best:

This is the making of the perfect storm. Reduced funding for prevention programs increasing the need for services and the funding reductions in areas like child welfare and mental health prevent us from having a staffing pattern to serve the increasing need. When the prevention programs are the first to go, due to being forced to fund only the minimum of the mandates, it is bad for children and families in this state.





WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

THE STATE BUDGET, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES **Senate Committee on Children, Families and Workforce Development** **April 15, 2009**

Presented by John Huebscher, Executive Director

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), I offer this written testimony on the provisions of the proposed 2009-11 budget as they relate to the well-being of children and families.

Although government budgets are laden with numbers, statistics, and estimates, fundamentally they are about people and the priorities of the community. The state budget is the place where we transform talk about family values into priorities that value families.

Today, the WCC focuses on two concerns regarding the state's budget: 1) Does the budget secure a basic safety net for children and families? 2) Does it enable a woman facing pregnancy to overcome health, fiscal, and other obstacles that may pressure her to choose abortion rather than life?

Securing the Safety Net

Any economic downturn imposes pain and suffering. Yet one constant in such difficult times is that those with the least tend to lose the most. A loss of income or savings that poses a temporary inconvenience in some families is often truly devastating to those who were just getting by in better times. Those who were in need of the community's help prior to the current downturn need it even more now. The programs and public benefits that aided them in 2008 will be even more necessary in 2009.

And the need is real.

The director of the St. Vincent de Paul office in Madison reports that demand is up by 10% over last quarter. Demand for food is up even more at 12%. He and his staff are seeing many people who haven't come to them before. And he expects things to get worse this summer as unemployment benefits run out.

Leadership of Catholic Charities in the Superior diocese reports:

- The numbers of families coming to his agencies for "first time assistance" continues to increase at approximately 10% per month since October 2008.
- Rent Smart, a program that assists renters to obtain affordable rental housing which meets codes, and the Mortgage Foreclosure Counseling caseload has increased from eleven

families in all of 2007 to ninety-four in 2008.

- The Emergency Family Shelter in Superior (Harbor House, operated by Faith United Methodist Church) is at capacity and has been since last summer.
- Food shelves, regardless of location, throughout the sixteen county service area of Catholic Charities are struggling to keep enough food on hand for the increased participation.

So it is precisely in these difficult times that Wisconsin must affirm its commitment to the core principles that define who we are as a society. One of these core principles is that the poor have a special claim on the support and assistance of the community, regardless of the circumstances.

On this score we offer the following:

Federal Title IV-E funds. The WCC is deeply concerned that a failure to mitigate the loss of federal Title IV-E funds will have a serious and significant impact on county and other human services agencies, including Catholic Charities agencies, and their efforts to help families in need of child welfare and other assistance. Restoring most, if not all, of this lost revenue is critical to sustaining programs for needy families.

Revisions to the Wisconsin Works (W-2) Program. The programs that W-2 replaced were often criticized as a one-size-fits-all approach to helping needy families. It is appropriate to ask whether these same flaws are present in today's W-2 system.

However one feels about the changes W-2 made in our approach to helping needy families, we can agree that the Wisconsin of today is much different than the Wisconsin of the mid-1990s when W-2 was launched. Then the economy was stronger, unemployment was low and dropping, and job options were greater.

None of that is true today. Rising unemployment and a struggling economy make it harder to find the kind of employment that will allow a person to exit the W-2 program.

Those who help W-2 clients see this first hand.

Again, Catholic Charities in Superior reports that the "last hired, first fired" have been joined by people who have had 20 and 30 years of steady employment and are finding themselves without a job for the first time in their lives. The "last hired, first fired" will remain at the end of the line until there is a complete recovery.

In light of this, Catholic Charities in Superior makes a compelling case that increased flexibility is required in the regulations of W-2, including an extension of time limits and the provision of employment related education, training and transportation programs, as well as child care assistance. Only with these changes will it be possible to truly assist low-income persons from disadvantaged educational backgrounds to meaningfully participate in the job market.

The director of St. Vincent de Paul in Madison says the same thing and he sees it from both sides. Not only do W-2 clients come to him for help but he also employs some of them in his agency. And he has to report them for noncompliance.

He can't be as lenient with them as he is with his own employees when they miss work due to illness or a sick child. He observed that if he terminated his own staff for the same reasons as W-2 he would have to pay unemployment compensation. He also adds that W-2 access is really difficult. "People are not eligible under the guidelines who clearly should be."

Both agency leaders say the program needs more flexibility.

In today's context, the Governor's proposals provide individuals the time needed to find sustainable jobs. These provisions make sense and are the decent thing to do.

Affirming Life Over Abortion

Many of you have told me that there are ways to be pro-life without renewing the debate over the legality of abortion. We believe that women will be less likely to choose abortion if they know that a strong safety net exists for them and their children, should they ever need it.

In some small but important ways, the budget accomplishes this.

Foster Care and Kinship Care. Foster care and kinship care are vital to children whose parents cannot care for them. The annual 5% increase in uniform foster care rates and an increase in funding for kinship care will foster pro-life choices. So will investing more than \$1 million over the next two years to fund a statewide foster parent-training program.

W-2 Eligibility for Pregnant Women in Their Third Trimester of Pregnancy. Any woman who encounters a health risk while pregnant endures a significant burden, both emotionally and physically. However, the pressure of such a pregnancy is made even more difficult when compounded by concerns that a woman will not be able to meet her basic needs and those of her unborn child. Extending W-2 eligibility to women with no other children who are in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy and are not able to work because of a medically verified at-risk pregnancy offers much needed support to women at a time of crisis. Indeed, we would favor extending such eligibility to all women of limited means facing at-risk pregnancies.

Time at Home for W-2 Participants with Newborn Children. The value of life is also affirmed by the provision that permits a woman who has participated in the W-2 program for at least three months prior to giving birth to remain at home for up to 26 weeks. We recognize many new mothers are not able to remain home for 26 weeks. Yet we also recognize that women who need W-2 services must raise children with greater challenges and less support than others. This provision, like the foster care and kinship supports mentioned above, is part of a safety net that helps women choose childbirth over abortion and helps them develop strong bonds with their newborns.

These provisions are "pro-life" in that they not only assist women in need of help, but also aid

their children. These provisions also speak to young girls who, though years away from becoming mothers themselves, take note of how we as a community respond to the needs of pregnant women. If young women come of age in a culture that respects life and truly nurtures it, then they may be more inclined to choose life themselves when confronted with difficult circumstances.

Conclusion

We don't envy you the hard choices you must make in the weeks ahead. However, those choices must continue to recognize a "preferential option" for the poor among us. We hope as you make these difficult decisions, you do so in ways that value families, especially those with vital needs made more difficult by our current economic troubles. Our greatness as a society can and will be measured by how we promote the good of those most vulnerable to the pressures of our age.



From PH folder dated
4/15/2009 - Dale?

2009-11 Biennial Budget

Maintaining Wisconsin's Commitment to Children & Families

Caring for children and families served in the child welfare system

- **Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare:** *Support* increased funding for out-of-home care expenditures, reduce Child Protective Services caseloads, expand the Mobile Urgent Treatment Team, add Initial Assessment workers, fund nurse home visits for foster children three and under, and improve worker retention. (LFB Summary, DCF - pg. 131, Items #2,3)
- **Children and Families BCA:** *Restore* \$20.6 million to maintain support for child welfare services statewide. The proposed cuts to county community aids will significantly erode county family supportive services across the state at a time when the human services needs are increasing. Among the services that will be reduced or eliminated as a result of these cuts are prevention programs, such as home visitation in a number of regions. (LFB Summary, DCF - pg. 134, Item #4)

Promoting deliberate, collaborative change in the child welfare system to achieve quality, individualized care for children in appropriate, community-based settings

- **Kinship homes and shift-staffed treatment foster care:** *Support* authority of DCF to rewrite administrative rules to license more kinship care homes and license shift-staffed foster homes to serve children in need of high levels of care in a community setting. While the licensing of kinship homes is an appropriate policy direction, as currently proposed, the licensed kinship home foster care rates will remain at the current \$215 level and there are insufficient resources allocated to address the cost of licensing and equitably supporting kinship providers under the new licensing rules. (LFB Summary, DCF - pg.135, Item #6)
- **Standard assessment for children in out-of-home care:** *Modify* the proposal that authorizes DCF to implement a statewide assessment tool for children served in the child welfare system. Instead phase-in the required assessment of all children using an agreed upon instrument or instruments. As the number of children assessed increases, more will be known about children in care and the state will be better positioned to propose changes within the continuum of care to best meet those needs. (LFB Summary, DCF - pg.135, Item #6)
- **Foster care provider payment system:** *Oppose* the proposal that empowers DCF to establish statewide, standardized provider reimbursement rates based upon the newly implemented child assessment tool. Instead retain flexibility of current provider rate setting mechanism to minimize disruptions to the current service delivery system during the transition to standardized assessment. (LFB Summary, DCF - pg.135, Item #6)
- **Child welfare agency payment system:** *Oppose* statutory change which empowers DCF to develop and implement a new system to regulate rates for residential care centers, group homes, treatment foster care agencies and type 2 providers. *Oppose* the proposed freeze in provider rates and the addition of DCF staff to implement provider rate regulation. (LFB Summary, DCF - pgs. 137-141, Item #7)

- **Increase in basic foster care rate:** *Support* 5% increase in each year of the biennium. (LFB Summary, DCF – pg.144, Item #10)
- **Foster parent training:** *Support* mandatory training, provided that the training curriculum builds upon existing training currently provided through licensing agencies. (LFB Summary, DCF – pg.147, Item #14)
- **Foster parent recruitment:** *Support* child welfare information campaign to promote recruitment and retention of foster care resources statewide. (LFB Summary, DCF – pg.148, Item #15)
- **Post adoption services:** *Adopt* increased funding for post adoption services. Funding has been stagnant since 1999, while families' needs have increased. Investment in these adoptive families, particularly those who have taken in children with a history of abuse and neglect, prevents the need for more intensive, costly interventions.

Moving forward with best practices and prevention strategies to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

- **Alternative Response pilot:** *Support* child welfare pilot to enable select counties to provide interventions with families screened into the child protective services system. (LFB Summary, DCF – pg.141, Item #8)
- **Foster care extension to 21:** *Adopt* federal option to extend support for more than 300 youth aging out of Wisconsin's foster care system annually.
- **Child welfare accreditation to raise standards of quality:** *Adopt* national accreditation for child welfare agencies as a strategy to increase standards of care and organizational competency, eliminate duplication of oversight for accredited agencies and allow state licensors to focus on programs that need more attention and support at no additional cost to the state.

Advancing health/mental health coverage and access

- **Medicaid/BadgerCare Plus:** *Support* maintaining eligibility and benefits. (LFB Summary, DHS – MA)
- **BadgerCare Plus for childless adults:** *Support* expansion. (LFB Summary, DHS – MA)
- **Mental health coverage – BC+:** *Adopt* mental health treatment coverage for BadgerCare Plus childless adults.
- **FamilyCare and mental health:** *Support* continued expansion of FamilyCare. While the implementation of FamilyCare may be slowed by funding constraints, efforts to improve the FamilyCare delivery system should be sustained. It is estimated that more than 40% of FamilyCare participants have mental health needs. Treating the whole person increases the effectiveness of the dollars spent on physical health. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA-LTC)
- **Wisconsin Quality Home Care:** *Modify* the proposal to address concerns raised by a variety of home health agencies, managed care organizations and consumers regarding the potential inequities that may result with the establishment of this statewide authority. (LFB Summary, DHS-Quality Assurance, pg. 385, Item # 1)

- **SBIRT Coverage:** *Support* expanding substance abuse screening, brief intervention and referral treatment (SBIRT) services to all Medicaid enrollees. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA, pg. 356, Item #8)
- **Streamlining MA service delivery:** *Adopt* a change in the MA prior authorization process required for fee-for-service mental health therapy by adopting the less cumbersome process currently in use by MA HMOs. Modeling the prior authorization process on that followed by MA HMOs would reduce paperwork for providers and should reduce MA reviewer consultant fees.

Adopt elimination of the physician prescription requirement for MA mental health services. Eliminating this requirement would save on psychiatrist time billed without compromising care.

Protecting community-based mental health care

- **Mental health institutes cost-shift:** *Oppose* the \$13 million in cost-shifting to counties of mental health institute placements for children and the elderly. While the stated intention of the proposal is to promote community-based options, shifting the cost of institutional care will undercut counties' capacity to develop and fund community based options. DHS is currently studying the mental health delivery system and a policy change of this magnitude should await the results of that study and subsequent stakeholder input. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA, pg. 353, Item #3)
- **Community Recovery Services:** *Support* state MA plan amendment to enable counties to claim reimbursement for mental health services potentially yielding more than \$14 million in new federal funding. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA, pg. 353, Item #4)
- **GPR investment in community-based mental health:** *Support* \$4 million to advance community based options for individuals with serious, chronic mental health conditions served through the community support, crisis intervention and comprehensive community services programs. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA, pg. 353, Item #3)
- **Birth to Three:** *Support* federal MA waiver to provide federal match for home or community-based services for MA eligible children who receive services under the birth-to-three program. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA, pg. 354, Item #5)
- **Children's long-term care waiver:** *Support* addition of children's long term care waiver slots. (LFB Summary, DHS-MA-LTC, pg. 365, Item #6)
- **Youth Aids:** *Restore* \$11.6 million in youth aids funding for counties.

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Kathy Markeland, WAFCA Senior Policy Advocate
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Sources: Legislative Audit Bureau 2009-11 Summary of Governor's Budget Recommendations (TOC)

Department of Children and Families

Department of Health Services



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MODIFY GRADUATED FOSTER CARE LICENSING SYSTEM PROPOSAL

(LFB Summary, DCF – pg.135, Item #6)

Governor: Recommends establishing a single licensing standard for foster care and treatment foster care with multiple levels of care that reflect increasing licensing requirements. Kinship Care providers would be licensed under the new standards and the increased federal revenue generated by licensing Kinship Care providers would be used to help fund out-of-home care in the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

WAFCA Analysis:

- The proposed revisions in the foster care administrative rules to *increase the number of licensed kinship care homes* and standardize licensure for the *increasing number of shift-staffed foster homes* around the state will enable the state to better support more children in out-of-home care settings that best meet their needs.
- While the *licensing of kinship homes is an appropriate policy direction*, as currently proposed, the licensed kinship home foster care rates will remain at the current \$215 level and there are *insufficient resources allocated to address the cost of licensing and equitably supporting kinship providers* under the new licensing rules.
- Identifying and adopting a *statewide assessment* tool for children served in the child welfare system should *ultimately result in a better understanding of the level of needs of children* in out of home care and better position providers to address service delivery gaps. While the implementation of a statewide assessment tool is a worthwhile objective, the *proposal should be amended to establish a phase-in period for the assessment*.

WAFCA Request:

- *Support* the modification of foster care licensing rules to enable licensure for more kinship homes and to standardize licensing of shift-staffed foster care homes.
- *Support* DCF authority and proposed funding to select and implement a statewide assessment tool for children in out-of-home care, but modify the proposal to allow for a manageable phase-in period.
- *Oppose* the new authority for DCF to establish statewide, standardized provider reimbursement rates based upon the newly implemented child assessment tool. Instead retain flexibility of current provider rate setting mechanism to minimize disruptions to the current service delivery system during the transition to standardized assessment.

About the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies

WAFCA is a membership organization representing non-profit and for profit mental health, education and social services agencies across Wisconsin. WAFCA promotes effective and accountable human services programs seeking to enhance the basic quality of life for families and children, especially those in crisis.



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OPPOSE CHILD WELFARE PROVIDER RATE REGULATION PROPOSAL

(LFB Summary, DCF – pgs. 137-141, Item #7)

Governor: Proposes that DCF establish a per client rate for the cost of care for children in group homes, residential care centers, type 2 care and treatment foster care. DCF would conduct an actuarial study to analyze current rates and based upon the results of the study develop a rate setting methodology that would first take effect in January 2011. The proposal includes a provision that freezes provider rates at the January 2009 rates through December 2010, during the actuarial study period.

WAFCA Analysis:

- There has been insufficient analysis of this proposal. It is impossible to determine its *potential to increase costs within the child welfare system and decrease capacity across the continuum of care for vulnerable children.*
- This major policy change was developed and proposed *without input from providers, county purchasers, foster parents and others.*
- The existing rate system incorporates a *significant level of transparency* through publication of rates and annual provider audits. Excessive rates are prevented by an allowable cost policy that *requires agencies to refund purchasers* when revenues exceed costs beyond the allowable reserve. The allowable reserve funds post and subsequent losses and the development of new programs. The system also allows for variation in rates to provide for specialized services for children with special needs.
- Out-of-home care providers have consistently responded to the state's requests to collaborate to draw down additional Medicaid dollars. In 2004, *RCCs implemented new health care and paperwork procedures to allow for Medicaid billing* which has brought millions in MA revenue to the state and is projected to draw down more than *\$16 million for the MA trust fund* in the coming biennium.
- The Legislative Audit Bureau studied RCC costs in 1993 and found that provider rate setting *would likely cost "nearly as much as the amount eventually saved."*
- There are many ways to manage expenditures on out-of-home care placements including: more prudent purchasing of services, preferred provider rates, performance-based contracting, etc. *The rate regulation proposal is one, limited strategy that narrowly focuses on the expenditure side without addressing the primary objective – quality services and measurable outcomes.*

WAFCA Request:

Oppose this proposed statutory change which empowers DCF to develop and implement a new system to regulate rates for residential care centers, group homes, treatment foster care agencies and type 2 providers.

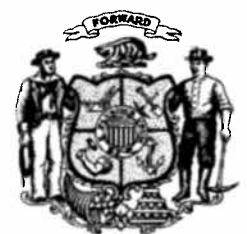
Oppose the proposed freeze in provider rates and the addition of DCF staff to implement provider rate regulation.

About the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies

WAFCA is a membership organization representing non-profit and for profit mental health, education and social services agencies across Wisconsin. WAFCA promotes effective and accountable human services programs seeking to enhance the basic quality of life for families and children, especially those in crisis.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



From PH folder dated
4/15/2009 - Date?



The Madison Area Accredited Early Childhood Association supports equal access for all children regardless of socioeconomic status to high quality early care and education. MAAECA works to support and enhance the infrastructure of the early care and education system.

MAAECA's Response to the Governor's Budget Proposal – Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS):

MAAECA supports the Governor's proposed QRIS and views it as an improvement on the current system in place through the 4-tiered reimbursement structure of Wisconsin Shares. MAAECA believes that the QRIS, as currently proposed, would be strengthened through:

- **Financial commitment to quality improvement through the investment of funds to support programs in improving their quality.**
 - This financial commitment should include funds for training and technical assistance, mini-grants available directly to programs to build capacity for high quality child care, and strengthening of the Wisconsin Shares funding structure to reimburse high quality programs at a higher rate which reflects the current market.
- **Inclusion of all regulated child care in the QRIS.**
 - The inclusion of Certified providers supports the goal of improving the overall quality of early care and education
- **Authentic Inclusion of the early childhood community in the crafting of the specific structure and requirements of the QRIS.**
- **Ensuring that Accreditation is affordable and attainable across the state.**

MAAECA's Response to the Governor's Budget Proposal – Wisconsin Shares Cost Containment :

The State of Wisconsin is currently auditing the Wisconsin Shares program. It is premature to establish cost saving measures at the expense of quality care and education. The audit will identify cost reductions through the elimination of fraud. The audit will also hopefully identify ways in which the system can be streamlined and improved to limit waste and fully fund the cost of high quality care and education. ***MAAECA is concerned about the proposals outlined in the budget to contain the costs of Wisconsin Shares and limit fraud.***

These proposals include:

- **10% increase in parent co-pays:**
Wisconsin Shares reimbursement rates have been frozen for five years and are not representative of market costs. Frozen reimbursement rates penalize high quality programs and low income families who are unable to access quality programming

due to high co-pays. By providing lower payments to providers, families will have to cover higher portions of the tuition. Low-income families, especially in these difficult economic times, cannot afford higher co-pays. The current system of frozen rates based upon regional market costs pushes low income families into low quality care. The children who are in most need of high quality, accredited early care and education are unable to access it due to the funding structure of Wisconsin Shares. The intent of federal funding is to assure that all children have access to quality care.

- ***Inclusion of child support in determining eligibility:***

The criteria currently established to qualify for funding through Wisconsin Shares excludes many families who cannot afford to pay for care. Creating more limitations by including child support in eligibility calculations will lead to more families struggling to pay the high cost of child care on a limited budget. MAAECA believes that all families and children have the right to be in a high quality early care and education environment.

- ***4-week average plus 10% attendance based payments:***

Attendance based policies provide lower payments to providers who have fixed costs. Attendance based payments result in higher parent co-pays due to the fact that full tuition is charged and families are responsible for the portion of the tuition not paid by Wisconsin Shares. Tuition is charged by the slot, not by the hour. Attendance based payments would ultimately result in higher levels of bad debt assumed by providers and a decreased ability of the early childhood community to serve low income children and families.

- ***Swipe card attendance system:***

Programs in states that have implemented a swipe card attendance based payment system have experienced an initial loss in 30% of their TANF child care subsidy funds due to underreporting of attendance by families. Providers in the State of Wisconsin have been underpaid for several years due to regionalized and frozen rates. Providers are not able to withstand further cuts in reimbursement. The swipe card system penalizes high quality programs for the failure of a few low quality providers to maintain program integrity. This system has the potential of putting high quality providers out of business. The costs incurred to implement this system could more appropriately be used to increase reimbursement rates for accredited programs to cover the actual cost of care or fully implement QRIS.

Contact: Joanna R. Parker (608)238-6700

joanna@learninggardens.com



CHILD SUPPORT TALKING POINTS (04/09)

CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Federal program created by Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, implemented by the States
- Feds pay 66% of costs States incur; States can also earn federal incentive payments for performance in 4 measures (paternity est., order est., current support collection, arrears collection)
- In Wisconsin the program is administered on a county basis through a contract with the State

Child Support Program serves more families than TANF and child welfare combined

- Children on public assistance - W2, MA (Badger Care Plus), Child Care, foster care, kinship care
- Families formerly on public assistance of any type
- Families never on assistance, but who apply for child support services, paying a \$25 app. fee

Annually - Wisconsin county child support agencies:

- **Establish paternity for over 22,000 children in Wisconsin** born to unmarried parents (gives fathers parental rights, gives custodians ability to seek support from absent parents)
- **Establish more than 40,000 court orders for support**; CSAs' enforcement of support orders result in 19,000 families receiving support payments each day. **\$1 billion collected annually** on support and arrears in WI
- As a part of those court orders, child support agencies systematically **obtain and enforce medical support orders** for the children on our cases. There are approximately 400,000 children who may benefit from these orders in Wisconsin. (More kids than families on TANF and child welfare combined)
- For every **\$1.00 invested** in the child support program in WI, The Program collects approx. **\$6.00 in child support**

Governor Doyle, in the last budget, created DCF to improve State's service to children & families by focusing on accountability & results

Proven track record of performance (2007 FFY data):

- 3th in nation in percentage of current child support collected ✓
- 7th in collections per employee
- 9th in collections per capita
- 20th in population size, but ranked 12th in total child support collections.
- **Cost-avoidance benefit** – for every \$1 disbursed to families in child support, there's a **40¢ cost avoidance ratio in public aid**

BUDGET BACKGROUND

- Federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 created major cuts – Wisconsin faced more than a **\$25 million annual cut** in federal child support funding for CY 2008, a 66.1% decrease in federal incentive funding. The cut took effect 10/1/07.
- This would've devastated Wisconsin's child support program:
 - Creating a potential for severe staff cuts, followed by
 - Potentially substantial reductions in services.

losing 4-1/3 of
child support staff -

(***Reference LFB memo from Kim Swissdorf to Rep. Samantha Kerkman, dated August 28, 2006***)

In response, WCSEA worked closely with DWD, DOA, LFB, Governor & Legislature to respond to the potential crisis:

- In light of State's budget issues in the last budget, sought only a partial backfill of the cuts - \$5.5 million annually in SFY's 2008-09.
- With federal match, resulted in \$16.2 million funding, total. (\$5.5 million plus \$10.7 million fed match at 66%)
- CSAs still realized an \$8.8 million annual shortfall

In last state budget cycle (SFY 07-09), Joint Finance Committee gave bipartisan, unanimous approval of investment \$5.5 million of GPR in SFY 2008-09, full legislature passed it as part of budget bill, and Governor signed it. There was never any opposition to this funding – support was universal.

IMPACT ON OUR PERFORMANCE

Doing our best at maintaining our performance (holding the line) by creating efficiencies, but since DRA took effect and since last budget cycle, it's becoming more difficult as agencies become leaner and the economy struggles; WCSEA's concerns:

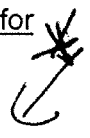
- Our job has been complicated by federal ruling on birth expense collection through tax refund intercept – CSAs required to review birth expenses assessed on all cases between 1989 and 2008, and adjust amounts to be consistent with new birth expense guidelines (this equals a huge reduction in monies collected, 15% of which was used to fund county CSA's - ie., estimated \$1.75 million annual loss, plus 66% match, or greater to program statewide). Additionally revisions were a huge unfunded work effort for county CSA's, diverting valuable time from collecting child support and serving families
- The DRA also added a substantial amount of new work by causing CSAs to "Review and Adjust" each case every three years, whether they need a change or not – this is 100,000 cases per year (1/3 of the 297,000 cases with orders.).
- Recent Federal audit changed the way we calculate reimbursement on financial work (required by statute) on non-IVD cases. This will substantially reduce our federal reimbursement.
- The federal government has also added new requirements regarding health insurance orders. Although, we always request/obtain an order for a parents to name children on their insurance if available at a reasonable cost through employment, we will now have to review and modify orders much more frequently to comply with this new mandate
- The economy is creating much additional work and complexity in the setting and enforcing of child support orders to get money to these children and families.
- In the short-term, we're concerned about losing federal performance incentives dollars; this could lead to a downward spiral in performance and further loss of incentives -- In the long-term, we're concerned that penalties for falling performance may impact TANF funds (as funding reductions occur, performance declines, fed performance dollars are less, and Wisconsin could be unable to meet "maintenance of effort" required by the Feds)

NEXT STATE BUDGET – WCSEA IS SEEKING:

1. \$8.5 million GPR per year for any time period not covered by the temporary abatement of the DRA cuts - simply backfills remaining annual budget whole created by the DRA of \$25 million, through matching federal dollars at 66%

The Good News: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) reinstated the ability to match our performance funds through 9-30-10. The means there are only 9 months for which we are requesting the \$8.5 million/yr. which equals \$6.375 million. Additionally, according to DOA the ARRA will save \$2.75 million in this biennium which they recommend utilizing in the budget you are now working on, so instead of needing \$17 million for the next biennium, we are only asking for \$3.625 million.

6m 3 mld



This is justifiable given the realities of our situation:

- This still reflects about an \$6 million annual loss (\$5.15 million for birth costs with federal match and up to \$1 million in reduced non-IVD reimbursement.)
- CSAs have worked hard at creating efficiencies.
- Substantial new mandated works efforts as outlined above
- We have already previously taken an \$8.8 million dollar loss
- At stake: CSAs ability to maintain performance; performance necessary for
 - Children, families well-being – safety net keeping families off aid/returning to aid, including MA (Badgercare Plus)
 - Maintaining federal incentive funding, preventing downward spiral (with less money, the lower the performance, and so on)
- This \$3.625 million, along with the ARRA provisions, would backfill the original DRA cuts and allow us to continue to maintain our high level of service for children in families in WI and avoid the substantial increase in government aid expenditures caused by any decrease in our collections (see cost avoidance info above.)

450,000 cas -
100,000 revised each year -

2. Medical Support Incentive Payment

- Purpose – increase the identification and enforcement of dependent health insurance coverage by County CSAs for children on MA within the CSA caseload (Minnesota model)
- As of August 2008, CSAs had identified and enrolled 31,922 MA children in private health insurance, for a savings of about \$30 million/yr. for DHFS.
- DHFS pays CSAs \$100 for each child for whom Health Insurance is identified and enforced through court order
- CSAs must reinvest the incentive payment in CSA activities
- Win-win for DHFS and CSAs
 - Provides CSAs with a financial incentive to prioritize the labor-intensive activity required to obtain coverage (Regardless of where Health Insurance information comes from - CSA initiates case and obtains court order, enters terms and data on computer system, sends out 9 page mailer to employer, answers employer/parent questions, makes determination if order is met and communicates to employer/parent, and enforces order in court.)
 - DHFS recoups cost of incentive payment in about 1 month
 - Child support gets twice the federal match on money compared to MA (i.e. \$100 dollars gets \$100 in MA match, whereas child support gets \$200 match on \$100)





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Watchdog Reports

Cashing In On Kids | Watchdog Report Update

State regulators to hold public hearings on child care reform

By [Raquel Rutledge](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Apr. 13, 2009

State regulators are launching a series of public hearings around the state seeking input from child care providers, parents, government workers and other stakeholders to help curb fraud in the state's day care system.

The sessions will focus on sweeping reforms aimed at improving the quality of care and curtailing financial abuse within the \$340 million-a-year subsidy program called Wisconsin Shares.

Wisconsin Shares provides child care assistance for low-income working parents.

The first of nine scheduled sessions will occur Thursday in Milwaukee. Meanwhile, the Senate is holding its own public hearing on Wisconsin Shares and other child welfare issues.

An investigation by the Journal Sentinel found parents and providers easily scam the system and get away with it. The series "Cashing in on Kids" detailed how the program is rife with lax regulations and shoddy oversight.

One woman claimed to care for children seven days a week for nearly eight months while the mother reported working at a lawn-care business. In another case, four sisters took in more than \$500,000 in less than three years, mostly for staying home and caring for each other's kids.

Several people highlighted in the series and in follow-up stories remain under criminal investigation by district attorneys in Racine and regulators in Milwaukee County.

Dan Harris, administrator of the Division of Early Care and Education within the state Department of Children and Families, said public input is key to successful reforms.

"It's absolutely critical that the people that will be affected by policies we're creating now have an opportunity to provide input and have an effect," Harris said.

The department already has decided to move forward with an automated system that requires parents to swipe a card to check their children in and out of licensed day care centers. Harris said the department is

gathering information on exactly how the system should work before putting out a request for a proposal.

The public also will be invited to comment on a quality rating and improvement system that would assign stars to licensed centers based on how well they meet specific criteria.

Akin to a hotel or restaurant ranking system, the proposal gives centers a one- to five-star rating considering criteria such as staff education and qualifications, curriculum and business practices.

Initially, Gov. Jim Doyle and state regulators said such a system would be tied to the payment system, with higher-quality centers receiving higher subsidy payments and lower-quality centers receiving less. But Doyle's actual budget proposal does not link the subsidies to quality.

His cabinet members say that, philosophically, that's the plan and that it might be included in a future budget proposal.

"By working to raise the level of quality as a whole, we would hope that the market for poor-quality and fraudulent centers would dry up," Harris said.

Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/watchdog/watchdogreports/42936812.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.



LA CROSSE Tribune

From PH Slider
4/15/2009. Date?

Counties protest Wisconsin cuts to services

By RICHARD MIAL / rmial@lacrossetribune.com

La Crosse County officials want to convince the state to change its mind on budget cuts for mandated human services.

Counties are willing to bear some cuts, County Administrator Steve O'Malley said, but proposed cuts in state-mandated human services the counties provides are too steep and create too much hardship.

"The cuts were more severe to counties than they were to other local governments," he said, "and it's at a time when we are seeing more demand for services."

La Crosse County officials — and the Wisconsin Counties Association — identified five areas of concern, all in human services:

- Aid to children and families, \$20.6 million in cuts statewide;
- Youth aids, \$11.8 million cut statewide;
- Increases in the rates counties must pay the state for placements in state juvenile correction institutions, \$2 million cut statewide;
- Income maintenance, \$11 million cut statewide;
- Mental health placements, \$13.7 million cut statewide.

There are issues with nursing home reimbursement as well, O'Malley said.

The total cuts to these human services programs in La Crosse County is about \$800,000 a year, O'Malley said.

"This is counties doing the state's work. This is about the state cutting us for things that the state requires us to do," he said. "It represents a huge shift back to property taxpayers."

O'Malley told the county's Legislative Committee to contact members of the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee to push for changes in the budget.

Human Services Director Gerald Huber said the state is committed to funding Milwaukee's human services needs — and Milwaukee clearly has significant needs. But the 71 other counties are being shorted in the process, he said.

Supervisor Sharon Hampson said the state could raise additional revenue by eliminating some property tax exemptions on services.

“I hope that Joint Finance shows some independence from the governor,” Supervisor John Medinger said.

State Rep. Jennifer Shilling, a Joint Finance member, said she and others on the committee are aware of the counties’ human service needs.

“Some of the counties are seeing double-digit increase in their caseloads,” Shilling said.

Joint Finance will meet twice a week, starting Thursday, until the end of May, she said.

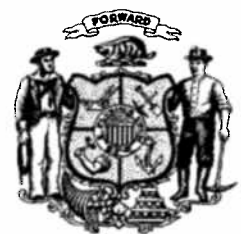
“Many of us are sympathetic to the challenges that are facing counties,” Shilling said.

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WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





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Milwaukee County

State takes over county's public assistance programs

By [Steve Schultze](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Feb. 3, 2009

The state's unprecedented move Tuesday to strip Milwaukee County of its role in administering food aid, child care and medical assistance programs was prompted by years of county mismanagement, state Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake said.

The takeover requires installing state managers but retaining county case workers, a "hybrid model" she said had never been tried before. Timberlake said that will require a law change that's likely to win legislative support. She said the new setup was the best way to fix the problems quickly.

County Executive Scott Walker, however, called Tuesday's state move "the worst of all scenarios." He said a county challenge may be mounted to the plan. Walker had suggested a state takeover himself. But he wanted to divest the county completely of the public assistance operation, which he said the state could do more cheaply because of the lower costs of the state's pension plan and other fringe benefits.

The county's budget for running the programs this year is \$51.4 million, with \$3 million from property taxes and the rest from state and federal money.

"This plan would stick it to Milwaukee County taxpayers," Walker said.

Timberlake announced the state takeover following a series of closed door meetings with county supervisors. The move was prompted by administrative bottlenecks resulting in unfair benefit denials, she said.

"Milwaukee County has demonstrated a sustained inability to successfully provide services to its (poor) customers," Timberlake said in a letter to Walker.

She disputed Walker's assertion that the problem has been the state underfunding the operation, or due to the souring economy.

The state "has in fact expended millions of additional dollars and thousands of hours of staff resources to assist your county over a period of years," Timberlake wrote. "Despite these efforts, Milwaukee County's performance fails national and state standards and is failing the people of the county."

The move includes a state takeover of the county's public assistance call center, the focal point of recent criticism about delayed and bungled aid applications.

The state move also is aimed at settling a class-action lawsuit accusing the state and county of shortchanging poor families.

Move criticized

County Board Chairman Lee Holloway agreed with Walker that the state takeover was unwise. He said the county must "prove to the Legislature that Milwaukee County can effectively provide these" programs itself.

Supervisor Peggy West, chairwoman of the board's Health and Human Needs Committee, said she would have preferred that the state take some less drastic action, such as an administrative probation.

The state's record in taking over the county child welfare program a decade ago does not inspire confidence in its ability to run the county's food, medical and child care programs, West said.

The state Bureau of Child Welfare has come under fire since the death of 13-month-old Christopher Thomas and severe injury of his 2-year-old sister while under kinship care of an aunt. The former director of the bureau transferred to a different job, and the state has promised reforms.

The state also has come under fire for its record in monitoring child care programs. A Journal Sentinel series last month showed instances of child care scams netting big payments. Timberlake said the state will move quickly to hire its own managers to run the aid programs.

The state takeover will be gradual, but by Jan. 1 all aspects of the aid programs will shift from the county to the state. The first shift happens by May 1, when the new state benefit office is slated to open, according to the state plan. The state will take over the call center by July 1. A new state-run benefit office where clients can meet with case workers is expected to open by next January.

According to a state memo:

- The county's poor performance in the programs includes answering only 5% of the hundreds of thousands of phone calls to the county's public assistance call center every month.
- The county fails to process 30% of its benefit applications within the required seven days, with some families waiting weeks or months for food or health care.
- In 2007, 60% of county decisions to deny food or health care benefits were overturned within two months. That resulted in benefit delays and forced families to go through time-consuming appeals or a second round of applications.
- The county's high food assistance error rate means nearly one in five deserving applicants were cut off from the program in fiscal 2008.



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Published April 9, 2009 | 12:26 a.m.

Welfare demand rises again

BY JOHN KREROWICZ
jkrerowicz@kenoshanews.com

Public assistance cases in the county jumped to another record for the 13th month in a row.

Kenosha County Human Services officials reported that their caseload on April 1 reached 14,497, up 2,165, or 18 percent, from 12,332 a year ago.

The food share — formerly food stamps — and medical assistance categories increased the most. Both are part of the caseload, which also includes Welfare to Work, child care and cash assistance.

Food share rose from 5,693 in April 2008 to 7,453, a 31 percent jump. Medical assistance increased from 9,140 to 10,136, an 11 percent hike, during the same time.

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Adelene Greene, director of the county Division of Workforce Development, said the jump was related to the poor economy and high local unemployment.

The monthly jump in the caseload has been in the triple digits the past six months, with the last three being greater than 200, said Greene.

"Two hundred per month is pretty significant," she said.

Greene said food share and medical assistance

numbers grew faster than other categories because of more liberal guidelines and alterations in what's considered the poverty level. She also said food share benefits were increased by 14 percent as of April 1.

The February unemployment rate for Kenosha County was 10.4 percent. The number of Kenosha County residents out of work more than doubled between October and February.

The March rate is expected to be released within two weeks.

While unemployment rose, the number of jobs available dwindled. The cumulative number of job listings at the county Job Center has fallen 69 percent this year compared to 2008: 1,510 postings a year ago vs. 471 now.

One reason for the drop was continuing economic difficulties for northeastern Illinois employers. Job postings from Lake County, Ill., employers typically make up 20 percent of the Kenosha County job list, said John Miisauskas, Job Center manager. The figure is now closer to 3 percent.

Another reason for the depleted listing, however, was a July change in how to post open positions, which some employers have not adapted to well, Miisauskas said.

Expected job losses from layoffs or company closings between July 1, 2008, and Sept. 30, 2009, has jumped to 1,056 with last week's announcement that Permacel, in Pleasant Prairie, plans to lay off 100. Sundyne recently laid off four employees, Miisauskas said.

Layoffs also are expected at IEA and Active USA/ATC Leasing, he said. Chrysler has some 150 pending layoffs, also.

Comments:



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QUESTION OF THE DAY

Tax returns were due on Wednesday unless an extension was filed. For those of you who received refunds this year, how did you or how do you plan to use the money?

Pay down bills.
 For vacation.
 Savings.
 Spend it on things I didn't have money for last year.

OK

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From PH 4/15/2009
folder.

State Senator Bob Jauch

Testimony before the Joint Legislative Audit Committee

Thursday, February 19, 2008

I applaud the decision by Co-Chairs Senator Vinehout and Representative Barca for scheduling the Audit Committee's first business a discussion of an audit of the Wisconsin shares program.

The illegal actions identified through the Journal Sentinel series are deplorable and require legislative attention to an audit to analyze expenditures, policies and procedures to aggressively target fraud and abuse to protect the integrity of our State's child care system and protect taxpayers.

Fraud and abuse and overpayments contribute to less than 2% of total program expenditures but we must maintain a zero tolerance to those who exploit this valuable program. They steal not only taxpayer money but rob the legitimate providers of dollars that are in short supply.

As the Governor stated in his State of the State address, we must uphold our duty to children and ensure that childcare services are accountable and up to the high standards the public expects. It is essential that we recognize and value the important work of the child care network and maintain sufficient policies and procedures to support a quality nurturing environment for all Wisconsin children.

This hearing addresses an acknowledgement that there is nothing more basic than caring for our children and as we review the necessity for an audit and implement reform, it is important that our discussions do not overshadow the honesty and excellent care offered by responsible providers to thousands of children across Wisconsin. Our children depend upon these outstanding providers for quality care and emotional and intellectual enrichment. Their parents depend upon these dedicated individuals to provide a safe and secure environment to enable them to provide the economic needs of their family. And as a society we recognize that child care providers are critical to the developmental needs of our children but are also essential to the well being of a healthy and productive society.

The 2001 audit can become a blueprint for corrective actions that we can take as a state to improve the quality of child care, hold providers accountable and improve the cost efficiency of this vitally important program.

While the audit will help the Legislature and Agency to identify efficiencies to improve oversight and accountability we cannot wait several months to begin to take action. There are immediate initiatives that can be implemented to aggressively target and eliminate fraud and abuse and I am pleased to have joined a majority of my colleagues in voting for those measures in the stimulus bill yesterday.

Taxpayers contribute \$340 million a year to support the Wisconsin Shares program. As caretakers of our children and stewards of taxpayer dollars, there is much at stake in addressing reforms to improve the Shares program. We owe the taxpayers our assurances that their tax dollars are efficiently spent. We owe our families our best effort to support a vital program that supports individuals and families in pursuit of meaningful, sustainable employment. Most of all we must hold true to a promise to our children that they will be provided quality and safe child care environment to assure a bright and hopeful future.

This audit can help highlight the importance of child care for our families, to our work places and the vitality of our economy. Child care is the gateway to employment. Without it, many of us and most families would simply be unable to work outside the home. The audit will provide the Legislature and the public an independent review of policies and practices with a view toward improving performance of this vitally important program to make our child care system is as efficient, economical and effective as possible.



From PH 4/15/2009
Folder.

Child Welfare—Bob's Notes
11/21/2008

Our safety net is badly frayed but that is no excuse. There is nothing worse than a child who should be in protective care is so traumatically violated. Our protective services laws are designed to protect kids who are in danger.

Children that could be alive, die every day in the United States, because people do not report and Child Protective Services across this country too often do not follow their own simple procedures. Agencies and individual employees alike need to be held accountable when they make choices that result in children's deaths that otherwise might have been avoided.

Obviously the goal of local organizations and public agencies is to respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable children and families. Training is necessary for the workforce that deals daily with the issues of child abuse and neglect. We must work with child protection professionals and agencies to improve their systems, so that greater emphasis is placed on processes and results that focus on the best interests of children and their families.

Through the worst tragedies we must find a way to convert it to making things better.

Something terrible went wrong. However, we as politicians must exhibit some reserve in giving the family and community a chance to grieve without adding our own emotional fuel to the fire of pain.

The Secretary has assured me and other Legislators that the Department has initiated a prompt examination of the facts of this case and are also evaluating their procedures to assure that ongoing children monitoring be continued.

We have to make the most from this terrible tragedy. We must create opportunities to do the right things in the memory of Christopher Thomas and his sister. We must step up our efforts to protect vulnerable children from abuse and neglect.

Obviously there needs to be accountability but we must insist that the State officials be given the time to thoroughly analyze the circumstances and produce a credible report stating their conclusions.

We must learn from this tragedy and adopt policy measures that result in long range improvements.

What kind of oversight is necessary to monitor ongoing caseloads and assure quality compliance.

Oversight

Prevention

Policies on placement

Need to carefully and honestly analyze foster care infrastructure.

Accountability on privatization

Engage the community