



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Legislative Council Conference Room
Madison, Wisconsin

August 29, 2006
10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the August 29, 2006 meeting of the Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families. The file copy of this summary has appended to it a copy of each document prepared for or submitted to the committee during the meeting. A digital recording of the meeting is available on our Web site at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lc>.]

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Kestell called the meeting to order. The roll was called and it was determined that a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Rep. Steve Kestell, Chair; Reps. Don Pridemore and Donna Seidel; Sen. Dale Schultz; and Public Members Jon Angeli, Lisa Boyd-Gonzalez, John Burgess, Charity Eleson, Carol Kelso, Paul Minkus, Paula Roberts, and Jack Westman.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Sens. Carol Roessler and Lena Taylor; and Public Members Norm Brickl, Kenneth Munson, and Jodi Roberts.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Laura Rose, Deputy Director; and Scott Grosz, Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Terry C. Anderson, Director, Legislative Council; Secretary Roberta Gassman, Department of Workforce Development; Secretary Helene Nelson, Department of Health and Family Services; and Jennifer Noyes, Researcher, and Tom Corbett, Senior Scientist, Institute for Research on Poverty.

Opening Remarks

Terry C. Anderson, Director of the Legislative Council, welcomed the committee and introduced the Legislative Council staff members assigned to work with the committee. He discussed

rules for voting and described the process of reimbursement of expenses. He noted that the committee's meetings will be recorded and available on the Internet.

Introduction of Committee Members; Discussion of Committee Assignment

Chair Kestell welcomed all members to the committee and thanked them for their commitment to serve on the committee. Chair Kestell asked each member of the committee to briefly introduce themselves.

Chair Kestell commented on the role of Wisconsin Special Committees as well as the unique origin of the Strengthening Wisconsin Families Committee. He noted Senator Schultz's efforts on the legislation that created the Strengthening Wisconsin Families Committee.

Senator Schultz noted the merits of the committee process. He discussed his letter to Chair Kestell, which discussed the committee's study charge, and reminded the committee of its capacity to effect change. Committee staff noted that Senator Schultz's letter would be posted on the committee's Internet site. [www.legis.state.wi.us/lc.]

Description of Material Distributed

Laura Rose, Deputy Director of the Legislative Council, noted the distribution of Staff Brief 06-01, *Overview of the Wisconsin Works Program and the Child Welfare System* (August 22, 2006), as well as the distribution of materials supplied by Mr. Angeli.

Presentations by Invited Speakers

[Note: PowerPoint presentations and other documents referred to by the speakers are posted on the committee's Internet site.]

Secretary Roberta Gassman, Department of Workforce Development (DWD), communicated the department's commitment to the same goals as the committee. She thanked the members of the committee for their past input to DWD. Secretary Gassman explained the Wisconsin Works program, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation, and responded to questions from the committee. The questions related to demographics of W-2 participants, as well as the number of participants in each of the career ladders of the W-2 program.

Next, **Secretary Helene Nelson**, Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), provided information on Wisconsin's child welfare system. Secretary Nelson noted referral and substantiation statistics as well as placement statistics. She described the challenges faced by DHFS in balancing its primary goal of protecting children from abuse and neglect with its desire to strengthen Wisconsin families. Secretary Nelson described the federal review of the Wisconsin child welfare system as well as problems faced by the system, such as high turnover of workers. Secretary Nelson also noted the relationship of the child welfare system to other state programs such as Food Share and BadgerCare. Secretary Nelson then responded to questions from the committee. The questions related to the overlap of W-2 and the child welfare system, as well as internal procedures for evaluation of the child welfare system.

Secretaries Nelson and Gassman explained Families Forward–Wisconsin, a state pilot program for W-2 and child welfare services integration. The pilot program, operating in six communities, encourages these communities to share their best practices for integration and emphasizes integration at the front end of system entry. They noted the challenges in reconciling several conflicting policies between the systems as well as the interdependence of the W-2 and child welfare systems. The Secretaries also noted the benefits to child welfare of increased family income along with barriers to integration, such as a lack of multi-system awareness by W-2 and child welfare system employees and a lack of funding coordination between the county, state, and federal levels.

Jennifer Noyes and Tom Corbett, Institute for Research on Poverty, presented an overview of problems faced by states in their efforts to integrate services such as W-2 and child welfare. A PowerPoint presentation as well as a handout facilitated their presentation.

After the invited speakers, the committee discussed the breadth and scope of its charge. The committee made suggestions regarding the content, speakers, and agenda for future meetings. Chair Kestell encouraged members to bring suggestions for specific changes to future meetings. Dr. Westman provided the committee with a handout comparing individual and family-oriented services.

Other Business

There was no other business brought before the committee.

Plans for Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Special Committee will be held on *Tuesday, September 26, 2006, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 411 South, State Capitol.*

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

SG:tlu