



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE  
MAJORITY LEADER  
**DALE W. SCHULTZ**

August 25, 2006

Representative Steve Kestell  
Room 17 West, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Kestell,

I see that the first meeting of the Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin's Families focuses on panel presentations by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) secretaries and staff and researchers for the Institute for Research on Poverty.

I am concerned that the first year's charge to the special committee is a study on W-2 and the child welfare system which severely limits what I thought was the purpose of the special committee.

Wisconsin Act 467 directs us to focus on "issues related to strengthening Wisconsin's families." It directs the special committee to study "ways to increase awareness of the importance of families in society in resolving social issues," followed by thirteen other specific suggestions including elements such as attachment and brain development, roles of fathers, identification of qualities held by successful Wisconsin families, and looking at a reconciliation council.

It was my understanding that this special committee was to look at ways to strengthen families, identify common values for Wisconsin and build communities to support our less strong and vulnerable families.

The agenda for the August 29<sup>th</sup> meeting does not facilitate our being able to have open and comprehensive discussion as to the best ways for this group to move forward. The preliminary agenda focuses on what appears to be DHFS's and DWD's agenda. It seems to be framing a debate that moves toward changing the focus of W-2 from work to moving the working poor out of poverty. It seems to have some preconceived notions on the best way to do that. It is an important subject to address but there are a number of options that should be explored, such as refocusing TANF dollars on assisting people to reorganize their lives around work.

I would like to suggest that we look to develop a lively discussion and debate on how we can best move forward in Wisconsin to support all Wisconsin families (poor and otherwise), how we can build a set of common values for those families to embrace and how we can provide the leadership to develop statewide community support for the Wisconsin family. Let's not focus on wedge issues but on the elements we all believe in such as parents wanting what is best for their children. This is not about the limited money available; it's about all of us working harder and better together.

We need to work to create a statewide consensus that supports families, revitalizes values, focuses on family strengthening decisions and provides the leadership to achieve this. Let us establish our agenda, provide leadership, develop concepts and then ask assistance from our state and educational partners.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, please feel free to call me at any time.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dale W. Schultz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name.

Dale W. Schultz  
Senate Majority Leader

cc: Members of the Strengthening Wisconsin Families Committee