



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Kevin R. Hayden, Secretary

February 1, 2007

Honorable Jim Sullivan, Co-Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Room 15 South
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Honorable Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Room 314 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Sullivan and Representative Jeskewitz:

I am pleased to provide you with the final report on the progress of the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) regarding items identified in the Legislative Audit Bureau's Evaluation of Milwaukee Child Welfare (Reports 06-1 & 06-2). As reported in the October 2006 interim report, we continue to make great strides towards implementing the recommendations made by the LAB, as well as in our efforts to meet the performance measures in the Jeanine B. Settlement Agreement.

As you are aware, families involved in Milwaukee County's child welfare system face many more obstacles and struggle with a wider array of challenges than in years past. As we continue to focus our efforts on providing effective and efficient services, our primary goal is to assure that children are safe in their own homes, and that their families are strong, healthy and self-sufficient. We believe the changes made to BMCW over the past few years move us in the right direction for helping families overcome the struggles they face, limiting their ability to care adequately for their children. I would like to highlight progress on several items since our interim report:

- **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.** In October 2006, a Qualitative Service Review led by the national Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group was conducted of BMCW. The review process looked at outcomes related to safety, stability and permanency, and system performance outcomes such as, family engagement, assessment and planning. Interviews were conducted with thirty-one stakeholder groups, representing BMCW staff, providers, foster parents, legal partners, and others. This review involved the greatest number of stakeholder interviews of any review conducted by the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, the agency completing reviews in 14 different states. Each reviewer spent a significant amount of time on their cases and brought a great deal of experience and knowledge to the process. BMCW performed well in its first review, surpassing many other similar child welfare systems' initial reviews. The review also found that BMCW faces some challenges, consistent with those found among all public

child welfare systems. BMCW has developed and is currently in the process of implementing a quality improvement plan that addresses the recommendations included in the report for each program area. BMCW management and the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council will present regularly to the community on BMCW's progress towards the practice improvement items found during the review.

- **SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES.** On December 31, 2005, the BMCW reached the conclusion of the third year of the Settlement Agreement between Children's Rights, Inc., on behalf of the plaintiffs, and the Department of Health and Family Services and other state defendants. Since that time, BMCW has been released from 10 enforceable provisions after being in compliance with the required items. Through 2006, BMCW continued to work diligently on meeting the performance requirements on the eight remaining enforceable provisions. We will report out to the community on our progress for 2006 later this spring.
- **FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION REDESIGN.** The BMCW recently completed the contracting process for the redesign of foster care and adoption services in Milwaukee. The new design places greater emphasis on all permanency options available to children involved in BMCW. We should have a common approach to working with foster parents who may become adoptive parents as 75% of children adopted through BMCW are adopted by their foster parents. We believe this new approach to foster care and adoption services will expedite achieving permanency for children and improve consistency throughout our service delivery system.
- **PLACEMENT OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN.** BMCW has placed a high priority on finding foster homes that fit the needs of children who cannot live safely in their own homes. As with all child welfare systems, BMCW faces difficulty in recruiting quality foster homes for our children. As such, we are engaged in an ongoing partnership with the faith community in Milwaukee to reach out to families in their congregations who may be interested in becoming foster and adoptive parents. In addition, BMCW issued a Request for Proposals for group settings for adolescents. Adolescents with behavioral needs are coming to the attention of BMCW at increasing rates, and face unique challenges that at times our foster families are not equipped to handle. BMCW will create a variety of group placement options for these adolescents that includes specialized programming to address their diverse behavioral, emotional and developmental needs.

Other key areas of focus are included, per your request, in the attached report. These items include: reduction in staff turnover, improved collaboration between the Department of Workforce Development and our department, and changes to BMCW contracts including financial incentives and performance expectations.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you in this final report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, the progress that BMCW has made in the key areas that we have placed priority. We have had critical partners in our efforts, including our private agencies, the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council, and foster, adoptive and birth parents. Without the shared commitment of our community partners, we would not show improvements in so many key areas. BMCW maintains its ongoing commitment to working with the community and to continue making practice improvements. We appreciate the continued support that the Joint Audit Committee has given to BMCW and the families we support.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin R. Hayden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kevin" being the most prominent.

Kevin R. Hayden
Secretary

CC: Members of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Janice Mueller, State Auditor
Special Legislative Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families

Enclosure