

Policy Brief: Department of Children and Family Services

January 2007

Background

- ◆ In Wisconsin, there are numerous health and human services, work supports, and workforce programs aimed at stabilizing the lives of families, ensuring the well-being of children, and helping adults to become self-sufficient.
- ◆ Many of Wisconsin's children and families find themselves in multi-system circles, needing resources from both the Departments of Workforce Development and Health and Family Services. For low-income families and children, navigating the maze of services can be a confusing, frustrating, and time-consuming endeavor.
- ◆ DHFS and DWD by definition have different missions – one focused on health, the other focused on the workforce. Moreover, the each department has its own goals, rules bureaucracies, funding mechanisms, and service delivery processes.
 - The primary goals of DHFS are to promote the health of all people in Wisconsin and to foster access to quality and affordable health care for all Wisconsin residents.
 - The child welfare program is currently a part of DHFS.
 - Child care center licensing and regulation is currently a part of DHFS.
 - The primary goal of DWD is to build and strengthen Wisconsin's workforce.
 - The W-2 program is currently a part of DWD
 - Child care center certification is a currently a part of DWD
 - The Wisconsin Shares childcare subsidy program is currently run by DWD.
 - The Wisconsin child support program is currently run by DWD.
- ◆ The delivery of these human services consists of a patchwork of programs and services from different funding streams, service delivery sites, administering agencies, and levels of government. This service delivery mechanism and its financing that accompanies has left many families falling through the cracks.
 - Improving government services for Wisconsin children and families has been a key priority for Governor Doyle since initially taking office in 2003.
 - In Spring 2004, Governor Doyle unveiled his KidsFirst initiative. *KidsFirst* is a comprehensive agenda to invest in Wisconsin's future by improving the lives of the state's children. The plan outlined Governor Doyle's priorities to make sure children are ready for success; are safe at home, in school and in their communities; have the opportunity to be raised by strong families; and grow up healthy.

- Under Governor Doyle's leadership, in 2004, Wisconsin was chosen by the National Governor's Association to develop strategies that promote collaboration among state and local agencies and organizations to showcase innovative approaches to forging partnerships that improve service delivery to families. Through this initiative, DHFS and DWD, worked with counties around the state to promote service integration of child welfare and W-2 at the local level.

Proposal

- ◆ Governor Doyle is calling for the creation of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services to ensure that Wisconsin children grow up safe, healthy, and successful in strong families.
 - The mission of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services will be to promote the economic and social well-being and safety of Wisconsin's children and families.
 - The Department will integrate child support key state programs: the child welfare program, the child support program, the child care subsidy program, and the W-2 program.
 - There will be five divisions in this Department: Division of Administrative Services, Division of State Child Welfare, Division of Milwaukee Child Welfare, Division of Wisconsin Works, and Division of Workforce Supports.
 - Creating a Department with these functions, outside of DHFS and DWD, will increase the amount of attention the state gave give in helping to protect our most vulnerable children and families.
 - In addition, by removing these functions out of their current department DHFS and DWD will be able to further sharpen their focus on fostering access to quality and affordable health care and building the workforce, respectively.
- ◆ The creation of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services is another clear example of the Governor's commitment to children and families in Wisconsin. In fact, this will be the state's first Cabinet agency devoted exclusively to helping and protecting the most vulnerable children and families in the state.
- ◆ In creating the Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services Wisconsin will improve the outcomes of our most vulnerable families by pursuing a more integrated, family-responsive and flexible approach to service delivery that is more efficient and effective by providing a more seamless service delivery system for our families and children.
- ◆ The Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services will provide statewide leadership and direction in planning, managing, and coordinating the statewide administration of programs for low-income children and families in Wisconsin.