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## WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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### STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Legislative Council Conference Room  
Madison, Wisconsin

July 30, 2007  
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the July 30, 2007 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>.]

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#### Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Kestell called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The roll was called and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Rep. Steve Kestell, Chair; Reps. Don Pridemore and Donna Seidel; Sens. Dale Schultz and Lena Taylor; and Public Members Jon Angeli, Lisa Boyd-Gonzalez, John Burgess, Paul Minkus, Jodi Roberts, Jack Westman, and Carol Wright.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Public Members Charity Eleson, Carol Kelso, Kenneth Munson, and Paula Roberts.

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

APPEARANCES: Ken Utech and Melissa Borowicz, Utech Consulting, Inc.; and Dan Naylor, White Pines Consulting Services, Inc.

#### Approval of the Minutes of the June 18, 2007 Meeting

*Jon Angeli, moved, seconded by Dr. Jack Westman, to approve the minutes of the June 18, 2007 meeting of the Special Committee. The motion was approved by a voice vote.*

## **Presentation by Invited Speakers**

Jon Angeli described family systems theory as a foundation for work with families and a potential common language for use throughout systems including, law, medicine, and education.

Invited speakers **Ken Utech** and **Melissa Borowicz**, Utech Consulting, Inc., described their background and the services provided by Utech Consulting. Generally, Utech Consulting uses family systems theory in the context of advising businesses. After providing a description of their backgrounds, Mr. Utech and Ms. Borowicz provided a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation began by describing current cultural preferences and approaches to problems. In particular, Mr. Utech noted that culture often looks at behavior and pathology and chooses to modify behavior in order to achieve desired results. He noted that this creates poor outcomes because presented problems often do not provide the complete view of a situation. Instead, family systems theory seeks to deal with an entire family rather than an individual and attempts to solve problems rather than fix instances of community anxiety. Family systems theory focuses on beliefs and attitudes in order to promote changes that consider relationships with others.

During the PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Utech and Ms. Borowicz responded to questions from the committee. In responding to questions, Mr. Utech offered several observations. He noted that our current systems are organized to change behaviors, rather than the reasons for those behaviors. Additionally, he stated that a problem with addressing symptoms is that symptoms serve a purpose to indicate larger issues. He also noted the need for system members to shift attitudes and approaches.

After hearing the responses of Mr. Utech and Ms. Borowicz, the committee members discussed issues related to systems theories and possible legislative action to implement family systems theories in human services. Dr. Westman noted the shift from the use of correctional facilities as treatment facilities to facilities that now employ “zero-tolerance” policies. Senator Schultz noted that society often exhibits tendencies to make large swings in policy choices. Senator Taylor raised the question of whether it was possible to create unity on family systems theory in a political community where a portion of that community does not believe government should have a role in family. She also asked whether the committee could review collaboration and best practices throughout the state and recommend ways to reward the state’s best performers.

## **Discussion of Committee Assignment**

Laura Rose explained the content of WLC: 0075/4, relating to collaborative systems of care for families with children who are involved in multiple systems of care, to the committee members. Chair Kestell thanked the members of the collaborative service teams (CST) subcommittee for their work. **Dan Naylor**, White Pines Consulting Services, Inc., offered some additional comments on the CST draft. He noted that implementation of CSTs has the potential to produce significant cost savings by keeping people out of more expensive systems. Chair Kestell and Senator Taylor commented on the difficulty of advancing a proposal that requires new funding. John Burgess inquired into the method by which the costs of the CST expansion were calculated. Chair Kestell stressed the importance of demonstrating savings in order to justify a program that requires new funding. John Burgess noted that the financial estimates suggest that financial incentives and funding should not be necessary to stimulate adoption of the CST model. Chair Kestell suggested that the committee needs to polish its ideas in order

to present them to the political community and suggested that additional questions regarding funding should be resolved before the draft is advanced.

Chair Kestell invited the committee to discuss the budget proposal to create a department of children and families. The committee agreed with the suggestion of Senator Taylor and Chair Kestell to draft a letter to the committee of conference.

Senator Taylor made several comments regarding physical placement and parenting plans. She stated that she supported the underlying intent of Representative Pridemore but that she could not support WLC: 0135/1. Instead she proposed a draft relating to parenting plans. She added that she would like to see the committee petition the Wisconsin Supreme Court to reassess the continuing legal education of guardians ad litem. Anne Sappenfield explained WLC: 0135/1, relating to equalizing physical placement to the highest degree. Dr. Westman noted that experts raise concerns about equal placement assumptions, and suggested that legislation aimed at contested divorces may result in unintended consequences. He expressed support for the parenting plan proposals described by Senator Taylor.

Representative Seidel expressed concern with the portion of WLC: 0135/1 that would allow changes in marital status as grounds for changes in a physical placement order. She suggested this provision would have the effect to increase the burden on an already overwhelmed judicial system. John Burgess questioned whether the best outcomes were not already achieved by a system that favors the best interests of children. The committee reached consensus to continue its discussions of physical placement and parenting plans at its next meeting.

Scott Grosz explained drafts WLC: 0143/1, WLC: 0144/1, and WLC: 0145/1, generally relating to issues of transportation. With regard to WLC: 0143/1, the committee decided to amend the draft to recognize a more neutral reference to “church,” and to allow additional time limits on the use of occupational licenses to conduct travel related to physical placement orders.

*Representative Seidel moved, seconded by Carol Wright, to approve WLC: 0143/1, as amended, by a vote of Ayes, 10 (Reps. Kestell, Pridemore, and Seidel; Sen. Taylor; and Public Members Angeli, Boyd-Gonzalez, Burgess, J. Roberts, Westman, and Wright); Noes, 0; and Absent 5 (Sen. Schultz; and Public Members Eleson, Kelso, Munson, and P. Roberts).*

*Chair Kestell moved, seconded by Representative Seidel, to approve WLC: 0144/1, by a vote of Ayes, 10 (Reps. Kestell, Pridemore, and Seidel; Sen. Taylor; and Public Members Angeli, Boyd-Gonzalez, Burgess, J. Roberts, Westman, and Wright); Noes, 0; and Absent 5 (Sen. Schultz; and Public Members Eleson, Kelso, Munson, and P. Roberts).*

### **Other Business**

There was no other business before the Special Committee at this time.

### **Plans for Future Meetings**

The next meeting will be held on *Monday, August 20, 2007, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 411 South, State Capitol, Madison.*

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

SG:ty