



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON CHILD WELFARE PROVIDER RATE IMPLEMENTATION

Presented by Saleem El-Amin on behalf of the:

***African American Alliance for Children & Families of Wisconsin
Po Box 090292
Milwaukee, WI 53209***

Adrienne J. Hunter
Board President
Servant Manor

Bevelyn Johnson
1st Vice President
AJA Enterprise

Pamela McNealy
2nd Vice President
The Lemonade Stand

Constance Palmer-Jones
Secretary
My Home Your Home

Shawn Broomfield
Treasurer
Right Turn



About the Alliance

For almost ten years, individual members of the African American Alliance have represented public and private agencies servicing youth and their families throughout Southeastern Wisconsin. Alliance member agencies provide services for at least 7,000 abused, neglected, delinquent and troubled children and youth in the custody of, or at risk of entering custody of the State of Wisconsin. Numerous community leaders and elected officials have served on the Boards of Alliance member agencies. Member agencies provide such services as family support, counseling, foster care, adoption, residential treatment, community prevention and intervention services, legal representation and technology support that touch thousands of individuals annually.

The mission of the African American Alliance for Children and Families of Wisconsin is to serve as a vehicle and voice of action for the under represented. For the purpose of operating in unity, we will advocate, train, and build capacity of member agencies so collectively; we may pursue our vision of equality of services, treatment, and operation.

In terms of advocacy, the Alliance helps the public and elected officials gain awareness and understanding around important policy and legal issues impacting child welfare. As the unique voice of African American social service agencies, we are well positioned to address the needs of our youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Demographic Assessment

For the past decade, the landscape in Milwaukee's Foster Care and Juvenile Justice Systems has been undergoing dramatic change. With marked improvements on some fronts, serious concerns still exist at all levels. Troubling statistics point to the need to "re-think" some of the current strategies and assumptions that attempt at addressing challenges in order to consider new alternatives. Race in particular remains a growing problem; one which heightens tensions at all levels and often results in stymied dialogue and insufficient as well as impractical action steps intended to address needs of youth and families.

Results from the 2008 Urban Youth & Family Feasibility Study (UYFFS) conducted by several Alliance member agencies indicate the current and prevailing trends in the foster care and juvenile justice systems are: 1) a decline in the foster care population, 2) potential increase in juvenile justice youth population, 3) homeless youth population is on the rise, 4) a continued demand for care continuum, 5) a saturated service provider network, 6) increased demand for specialized services, 7) increased need for foster parents, and 8) increased demand for "young adult" support services.

Based on the research and assessment conducted by the UYFFS Consortium, a series of recommendations were published and are now being implemented. A copy of the study is available upon written request.



Key Issues to be Addressed

Juvenile facilities make up a large block of institutions providing residential care. A steady rise in youth crime has led to an increasing demand for juvenile treatment services in addition to providers who are qualified and experienced in serving troubled youth.

Broad consensus exists amongst Milwaukee service level providers that much can be done to improve outcomes for youth currently receiving residential, group, and in-home care. According to industry analysts, the current conditions of residential care reflect the differing funding sources of its various segments. Although the demand for residential care seems to be increasing across the board, only those facilities funded through private investment seem able to meet the demand. Those relying on government funding are struggling to find ways to meet the needs of their clients with the limited resources available to them.

Particularly, a unified group home rate system would be detrimental to smaller social service providers in two fold. First, in order to meet the increasing mental health demands of the children we serve, we must hire qualified staff at higher rates of pay. Staff is required to have an in-depth understanding of the mental and behavioral disorders that our youth are plagued with in order to better understand their illness and provide treatment. Second, an increase of personnel per shift is required to effectively address the emotional and physical outburst encountered by youth care workers. All of which we are currently doing; however, due to the limited funding sources, a unified rate would not allow us to compete with larger organizations who have multiple programs and funding sources.

Members of the Alliance are committed to adopting and executing an evidence-based treatment model to improve outcomes, quality of service, and reduce recidivism rates. Our efforts to understand the local conditions, successful evidence-based practices, and their potential application within our agencies and the broader community are undertaken with a sincere focus toward improving the success rate of youth and families exiting the systems. This information is intended to present a picture of the current issues faced by local grass roots minority social service providers. We hope to contribute to the public policy discussion on child welfare and juvenile justice in Southeastern Wisconsin.