



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Room 411 South, State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin

September 26, 2008
10:00 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the September 26, 2008 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>.]

Call to Order and Roll Call

Co-Chair Kestell called the meeting to order. The roll was called and it was determined that a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Rep. Steve Kestell, Co-Chair; Sen. Dale Schultz; Rep. Sheryl Albers; and Public Members Jon Angeli, John Burgess, Gary Erdmann, Debra Fields, Lucille Rosenberg, Mary Jo Tittl, and Jack Westman.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Sen. Lena Taylor, Co-Chair; Rep. Tamara Grigsby; and Public Members Undraye Howard, and Terence Ray.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Anne Sappenfield, Senior Staff Attorney; and Jessica Karls, Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Gerald Huber, Human Services Director, La Crosse County; and Dan Naylor, CST Specialist, White Pine Consulting Service, Inc.

Approval of the Minutes of the Committee's August 25, 2008 Meeting

Mr. Westman moved, seconded by Mr. Burgess, that the minutes of the August 25, 2008 meeting be approved. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

Presentations by Invited Speakers

- ***Gerald Huber, Human Services Director, La Crosse County***

Mr. Huber began his presentation with information about the La Crosse County Human Services Department, including information about the sources of revenue received by the department. He indicated that the La Crosse County Human Services Department depends on local property taxes as a source of revenue less than other county human services departments. He noted that half of his department's 2009 budget focuses on family and children services, but he expressed a concern about the ability to maintain services because of funding limitations. He described the policy of La Crosse County on strengthening families as limiting child protective service (CPS) involvement to more egregious cases and stretching the continuum of care and services to reach more families earlier and build community capacity. In addition, he noted that Wisconsin is one out of 10 states where family and children services are administered at the local level.

Mr. Huber described various programs and initiatives that he has been involved in, including "No Wrong Door for Kids" and Community Response. In the "No Wrong Door for Kids" program, the practice and philosophy of care are consistent among services, such as juvenile justice and CPS. He noted that the philosophy focuses on family strengths and individualized services. The program creates one umbrella for children and family services, and the services involved in the program consolidate their budgets.

Mr. Huber stated that the current child welfare system is too reactive and does not prevent initial child abuse but may prevent further child abuse. He listed the leading factors that cause families to enter the CPS system, including poverty; substance abuse; chronic issues of mental health; and lack of education, which leads to little opportunity for employment.

Mr. Huber then described the Community Response program, which offers services to families whose CPS cases are screened out or closed. Services include assistance with housing, applying for economic support, and accessing mental health or substance abuse services. Mr. Huber described the Community Response + program as an extension of the Community Response program that La Crosse County wants to use for CPS cases that are screened in. He noted that his department must get approval from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to proceed with the program. He noted that fewer re-referrals to CPS occur for families who participate in Community Response than for families who go through the traditional CPS process. Additionally, he stated that although alternative response programs may cost more initially, cost savings can occur three to five years later.

Mr. Huber responded to questions from committee members. During his responses, he stated that families should be asked what they need and that it is important that someone from the community, and not from the county, asks these questions. He emphasized the need to involve the whole community, including the private sector, and to adjust services for the male single-parent family. He noted that keeping families out of poverty would keep many families out of the CPS system. He asked that the state look at statute and administrative code changes to incorporate alternative response programs, such as Community Response.

- ***Dan Naylor, CST Specialist, White Pine Consulting Service, Inc.***

Mr. Naylor began his presentation describing the objectives of collaborative systems of care as providing the right resources to the right people at the right time; and building a strong foundation for collaboration using creative strategies, evidence-based practices, and innovations.

Mr. Naylor described 2007 Assembly Bill 700 (AB 700), relating to children with severe disabilities or who are involved in multiple systems of care, or both, and their families. He explained that AB 700 establishes coordinated services teams and includes children in multiple systems of care in the program, unlike the integrated services project under current law, which provides services to children with severe disabilities. In addition, he explained that AB 700 adds tribes as entities that may administer a coordinated services team; expands the participants on the coordinating committee to include elected officials and others; provides ongoing coaching and support for staff and families; and includes \$1,466,000 to fund the expansion of the program.

Mr. Naylor responded to questions from committee members. In his responses, he indicated that AB 700 does not distinguish between children with autism and those without but, rather, focuses on whether a child is involved in multiple systems of care. He described how AB 700 focuses on having family members, providers, and others at the table to develop a plan and create meaningful outcomes. He noted that there are limitations on expanding the program without funding and that counties are waiting for grant money to establish coordinated service team initiatives.

Discussion of Committee Assignment

Committee members discussed specific issues that the committee may further study. Co-Chair Kestell noted that committee members should consider specific statutory changes and that the committee will take up a redraft of AB 700.

Representative Albers stated that the committee should hear from individuals from Milwaukee, given the significant impact that any changes to human services would have on Milwaukee.

Mr. Westman indicated that the committee should hear more from DCF about collaboration efforts to see how DCF is modifying or continuing these efforts.

Mr. Angeli expressed interest in neighborhood or community heroes and family mentoring and stated that if these fall below 5% of a community's population, a drastic impact is felt in the community.

Mr. Erdmann stated that the committee should discuss extending foster care to age 21. He noted that a recent federal law gives states an option to extend foster care to age 21 and that the economic and transitional benefits to youth of extended foster care are substantial. Ms. Fields supported this suggestion, and Co-Chair Kestell noted that such an option may have a significant fiscal component.

Senator Schultz indicated that the committee should hear from Central and Southwestern Wisconsin community action program agencies.

Mr. Burgess expressed interest in home visitation programs to prevent child abuse and neglect and suggested that DCF be directed to implement home visitation. Ms. Tittl also expressed interest in early intervention and home visitation.

Ms. Rosenberg stated that the committee should study the qualifications of day care programs, especially concerning education for children at day care.

Mr. Burgess asked how the committee can coordinate its discussion with DCF. Co-Chair Kestell indicated that DCF would provide an update at the next meeting.

Representative Albers requested that the secretaries of DCF and Department of Health Services (DHS) be asked why AB 700 was not submitted as part of their budget requests.

Co-Chair Kestell stated that the committee would send a letter to the Governor, DCF, DHS, and the Department of Public Instruction, asking for inclusion of AB 700 in the Governor's budget.

Other Business

There was no other business brought before the committee.

Plans for Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Special Committee will be on *Thursday, October 16, 2008, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 411 South, State Capitol, Madison.*

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

JK:wu:jal