


**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Honorable Members of the Legislative Council Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families

**FROM:** Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Senior Legislative Associate 

**DATE:** January 22, 2009

**SUBJECT:** Comments on WLC:0383/1 and 0346/2

The Wisconsin Counties Association, with the assistance of the Wisconsin County Human Service Association (WCHSA), just completed a rapid review of the bill drafts before the committee on January 26, 2009. We would like to share our thoughts with you on the proposals slated for discussion.

WLC: 0346/2 – Creating a Family Policy Board and Requiring Counties to Provide Prevention Services

There is universal agreement that providing prevention services to children and families in need is a laudable goal. There is also agreement that in order to make that happen, the state, counties and private agencies need to work together. However, counties have expressed some concern with the bill draft.

The bill draft requires counties to provide programs and resources designed to prevent delinquency, child abuse and neglect, dependency, mental illness, developmental disability, mental infirmity, and other forms of mental or social maladjustment, and to promote positive youth development and effective parenting skills **“within the limits of available state and federal funds and of county funds appropriated to match state funds.”** A quick search of the statutes shows language of this nature appears several times in state law, eight times in Chapter 51 alone. In general, this bill is “mandating” that counties provide prevention services; however, the practical reality is that language of this sort will do nothing to enhance the provision of prevention programs across the state.

County prevention programs are currently funded with Title IV-E dollars, community aids and county property tax levy. Title IV-E dollars will no longer be available to counties after 2009. Counties, in 2006, provided over \$416 million in community aids overmatch dollars (funding above the required county match). With levy limits, there are

no new county dollars available to provide new services, let alone maintain our current level of service. There is great concern among counties about placing the promise of services in state statute that we know we cannot provide.

Counties want to maintain a continuum of services for children and families that assure protection and permanency; however, this must be done in a way that assures the adequacy of funding for each community.

The bill draft also requires counties to include additional items in their plans for the delivery of human services. There is a cost associated with this provision as well.

WLC: 0383/1 – Requiring notice to relatives when a child is taken into custody

There is general agreement that the notification of relatives is good practice; it is happening in many counties already. However, counties have expressed concern that ordering counties to do it at the temporary custody hearing may be premature, as many of the hearings happen before a petition is even filed and many children end up returning home.

There is some concern among county staff that this bill draft will increase workload at the county level. In addition, counties have expressed concern that the formalization of the process in court-required forms may slow the court process and require continuances.

Thank you for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact the WCA office if you have any questions.

cc: Ann Wondergem, President, WCHSA