

History of the Wisconsin Family Policy Board Proposal

The Family Policy Board proposal has been incubating in Wisconsin since the 1980s under the influence of emerging best professional practices, federal legislation, the experience of over twenty states, and local family resource integration efforts within Wisconsin.

National Level

The professional approach to child welfare has shifted from an ineffective child-saver/child-protection approach to an effective family strengthening approach. In the process, recognition that the most important factor in a child's life is a thriving family has led to transforming *child welfare* into *family welfare* and to integrating resources for children and families.

Federal legislation over the last 30 years has been devoted to developing better ways of implementing family preservation concepts.¹ There also has been an emphasis on service integration and the timely termination of parental rights and adoption. The theme *strengthening families* has emerged as the most effective prevention and intervention approach to struggling families.

In the 1990s, a number of states received grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to create state/local family collaborative systems designed to respond to local needs for strengthening families. Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Iowa are among the twenty states that now have ten to fifteen years of experience with state/local collaborative systems. The Wisconsin Family Policy Board proposal has been influenced by the experiences of these systems.

In Wisconsin

The state Family Policy Board proposal for Wisconsin has been emerging through four venues.²

Localities

The first venue is from communities through the Right From The Start Coalition. Ramon Wagner of Community Advocates in Milwaukee developed the first draft for a Family Policy Board in the 1980s. The Collaborative Systems of Care movement has continued this thrust through forming local collaboratives and a state Children Come First Advisory Committee. Many localities now have collaborative structures that could readily relate to a state Board.

State Department of Health and Family Services

The second venue has been through the state Department of Health and Family Services. Two previous Administrators of the Division of Children and Families, Frank Newgent and Bernard Stumbras, advanced the proposal as members of Wisconsin Cares. The present application of the proposed Family

Policy Board would give the Department of Children and Families a cross-system context.

Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on State/Local State-Local Partnerships for the 21st Century

The third venue was the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on State-Local Partnerships for the 21st Century (the Kettl Commission) that developed a number of recommendations in 2001 to improve communication between state agencies and localities.

Joint Legislative Council Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families

The fourth venue is the Joint Legislative Council Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families. In 2007, its first iteration began the process of developing recommendations to improve the effectiveness of state and local efforts to strengthen families.

Examples of Wisconsin panels

The Governor's Cabinet consists of 18 members.

There are 69 state agencies and over 200 boards, councils, commissions, and task forces.

There are 82 boards.

A sampling of state board membership is as follows:

Agriculture, trade, and consumer protection board - 9

Arts board - 15

Child abuse and neglect prevention board – 20

Emergency medical services board – 15

Higher educational aids board – 13

Land and water conservation board – 11

Medical College of Wisconsin Board of Trustees – 34

Medical examining board – 14

University Hospitals Clinics authority and board – 17

The proposed Family Policy Board would have 27 members

References

1. Mallon, Gerald P. & Hess, Peg McCartt (Eds.) *Child Welfare for the Twenty-First Century: A Handbook of Practices, Policies, and Programs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

2. Wisconsin Cares (2008) *A Plan for Strengthening Wisconsin Families through a State Family Policy Board*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Cares, Inc.