



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Room 300 Southeast, State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin

January 26, 2009
10:00 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the January 26, 2009 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 later determined that a quorum was present.

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Rep. Tamara Grigsby; and Public Members Undraye Howard and Terrence Ray.

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

APPEARANCES: Jane Penner-Hoppe, Policy Advisor, and John Touhy, Deputy Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Approval of the Minutes of the Committee's December 4, 2008 Meeting

Mr. Angeli moved, seconded by Ms. Fields, to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2008 meeting. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Update from DCF

Jane Penner-Hoppe provided an update from DCF. She explained that the Building Bridges to Economic Success Conference will be held in Milwaukee on May 4-5, 2009. She also noted that the membership for the Early Childhood Advisory Council has been established and that the Council will hold its first meeting in late February.

John Touhy explained the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act and its effect on the state. The Act provides Title IV-E funding for certain relative guardianships and to tribes providing child welfare services; requires notice to the adult relatives of a child when a child is placed out of the home; requires placement of siblings together, unless the placement is contrary to the safety or well-being of a sibling; and requires independent living transition plans for children aging out of foster care, which include plans for education, health care, and support services. Mr. Touhy explained that he expects that the federal government will provide additional guidance to the states and that the Act has various effective dates. He also noted that the major fiscal provisions of the Act are beneficial to the state and will increase the state's access to Title IV-E funding. He answered questions from committee members about the Act and various other issues, including placement fathers, caseworker qualifications and turnover, and emergency foster care placements.

Mr. Touhy said that he would provide the committee with information on caseworker turnover at the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare and the years of experience and caseloads of caseworkers at the Bureau.

Discussion of Committee Assignment

- WLC: 0346/2, relating to creating a family policy board and requiring counties to provide prevention resources.

Jessica Karls explained WLC: 0346/2, relating to creating a family policy board and requiring counties to provide prevention resources.

Ms. Albers expressed concern with the use of "prevention" in reference to mental illness. She also noted that the requirements of public members may be too broad, and she expressed concern that the duties of a family policy board may conflict with the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council.

Mr. Burgess stated that he is interested in hearing from the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board about the bill draft.

Mr. Angeli noted the importance of bringing the community into the process.

Mr. Westman suggested that the committee devote a full meeting to the bill draft.

Co-Chair Taylor noted that the committee would discuss the bill draft at the next meeting.

- WLC: 0383/1, relating to requiring notice to relatives when a child is taken into custody.

Anne Sappenfield explained WLC: 0383/1, relating to requiring notice to relatives when a child is taken into custody. Committee members requested several modifications to the bill draft.

Co-Chair Taylor requested that a child, in addition to the parent, be asked for the names of relatives, if the child is old enough.

Ms. Tittl requested that the bill draft refer to the definition of “adult relative” in the Children’s Code. Ms. Sappenfield explained that using that definition would require that a county or DCF notify all of the relatives in the definition of “adult relative.” Committee members requested that the bill draft require the notification of certain relatives and allow for the notification of additional relatives.

Co-Chair Kestell noted that limited notification requirements set forth in the draft should not substitute good judgment by those involved.

Committee members discussed requiring DCF to create a template for notification of relatives, so that the notification is uniform across the state.

Senator Schultz expressed a concern that a caseworker may use a check list to complete tasks relating to notifying relatives when a child is taken into custody rather than professional judgment.

Co-Chair Taylor asked staff to revise the bill draft to incorporate the committee’s comments.

Other Business

Co-Chair Taylor noted that the committee would discuss the Family Policy Board and relative notification bill drafts at its next meeting.

Plans for Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Special Committee will be held at the call of the Co-Chairs.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

JK:jal