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## WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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### STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Room 411 South, State Capitol  
Madison, Wisconsin

March 3, 2009  
10:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the March 3, 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>.]

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#### 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 and Sen. Lena Taylor, Co-Chairs; Sen. Dale Schultz; and Public Members Sheryl Albers, Jon Angeli, John Burgess, Gary Erdmann, Terence Ray, Lucille Rosenberg, and Jack Westman.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Rep. Tamara Grigsby; and Public Members Debra Fields, Undraye Howard, and Mary Jo Tittl.

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

APPEARANCES: Dr. Jack Westman, President, Wisconsin Cares, Inc.; Mary Anne Snyder, Executive Director, Children's Trust Fund; Lisa Patrick, Administrator, Division of Prevention and Service Integration, Department of Children and Families (DCF); Susan Conwell, Executive Director, Kids Matter, Inc.; Jonathan Boyd, Darryl Sanders, and Erika Steward, Milwaukee Youth Advisory Council; and Cyrus Behroozi, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, DCF.

## **Approval of the Minutes of the Committee's January 26, 2009 Meeting**

*Co-Chair Taylor moved, seconded by Senator Schultz, to approve the minutes of the January 26, 2009 meeting. The motion was adopted unanimously.*

### **Presentations by Invited Speakers**

*Dr. Jack Westman, President, Wisconsin Cares, Inc.*, presented a PowerPoint presentation to the committee. He said that the process of developing a proposal for a family policy integration board began years ago. He presented information relating to the many issues that face families in Wisconsin and the several state agencies that have functions that affect families. He said that, to people working in the trenches, it feels as if there is a morass of services and programs. He said that a family policy integration board would try to develop a systems approach for all of the resources and programs that support and touch families. He said that, with the family policy integration board, Wisconsin would lead the nation in strengthening families.

Ms. Albers said that, in Juneau County, there is a local effort to integrate services through a family policy board structure. She raised the concern that a state family policy integration board would create a top-down approach to integration of services. Dr. Westman responded that the board is a platform for local boards to communicate with each other and the state and would actually be a bottom-up approach.

Mr. Angeli said that it is very important to bring a process of change in order to bring support to families.

*Mary Anne Snyder, Executive Director, Children's Trust Fund (CTF)*, described the history of Wisconsin's CTF and the membership of the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board. She discussed the mission and responsibilities of CTF and described the key strategies and initiatives of CTF.

She said that the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board does not support the proposal to create a family policy integration board because the board believes that the CTF is already addressing many of the issues raised in the family policy integration board proposal. She said the board members believe that the board has the capacity and statutory authority to address any gaps in services identified by the executive or legislative branch. Finally, she said the board wishes to continue to focus its efforts on its core mission of preventing child abuse and neglect.

Co-Chair Kestell said that he does not agree with keeping the status quo, and that there is still little collaboration among state agencies. Ms. Snyder responded that she believes there is unprecedented support to integrate services from the Secretary of DCF and the Governor.

Ms. Rosenberg said that the concept of integration is missing and that prevention cannot be separated from other activities such as treatment. She also said she is concerned that adolescents are not considered when discussing prevention. She said that she supports the concept of a family policy integration board.

Co-Chair Taylor asked Ms. Snyder to ask the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board to provide information to the committee as to whether there are additional responsibilities or members the board would recommend in order to better fulfill the goal of integrating resources for families.

*Lisa Patrick, Administrator, Division of Prevention and Service Integration, DCF*, said that DCF is concerned that a family policy integration board may be a duplication of efforts and may negatively affect efforts to integrate resources already being pursued by the Division of Prevention and Service Integration, DCF and CTF.

Co-Chair Taylor asked Ms. Patrick to provide a proposal to improve collaboration and integration of services and resources for families to the committee.

### **Discussion of Committee Assignment**

*WLC: 0346/3, relating to creating a family policy board and requiring counties to provide prevention resources.* There was consensus to discuss WLC: 0346/3 at a subsequent committee meeting.

Dr. Westman asked that a letter be sent to the committee that selects topics for Family Impact Seminars to request that the next seminar to be planned focus on efforts to integrate services and resources for families. There was consensus for the co-chairs to send the letter.

*WLC: 0383/3, relating to requiring notice to relatives when a child is taken into custody.* Ms. Sappenfield described WLC: 0383/3 and the changes made to the draft since the last meeting. She said that the new version of the draft expands what must be included in the notice to relatives when a child is taken into custody and permits a child's parent to provide information relating to family friends that the parent would like the court to consider as placement options for the child. Also, the recent version of the draft requires a child's permanency plan to include information on efforts made to contact relatives and family friends of a child as required by the draft and as identified by the child or the child's parent. Finally, the draft permits an agency to provide confidential information to a child's relative only to the extent necessary to establish a relationship between the child and the relative or placement with the relative.

There was consensus to modify the draft so that an agency would not be required to notify a child's relatives if a child is returned to his or her home within 30 days after the temporary custody hearing. In addition, there was consensus to allow disclosure of information to relatives to establish a relationship or facilitate placement even if the relative is related to a parent of the child whose parental rights have been terminated.

*Ms. Albers moved, seconded by Mr. Erdmann, to approve the changes to WLC: 0363/3, as noted above, and to recommend the draft for introduction by the Joint Legislative Council in the 2009-10 Legislature. The motion passed on a roll call vote of Ayes, 8 (Taylor, Kestell, Schultz, Albers, Angeli, Erdmann, Rosenberg, and Westman); Noes, 0; and Absent, 6 (Grigsby, Burgess, Fields, Howard, Ray, and Tittl).*

## **Presentations by Invited Speakers**

*Susan Conwell, Executive Director, Kids Matter, Inc.*, said that Kids Matter, Inc., is dedicated to removing obstacles so that children and families can succeed.

She made several recommendations to the committee. First, she recommended that Wisconsin develop a bill of rights for youth and families. She said a good starting place would be a bill of rights for children and families in the child welfare system. She said that 18 states have such a bill of rights and that it would be important to receive input from youth in developing the bill of rights.

Second, she recommended a code of ethics for case management staff in order to make case management services more uniform and to professionalize case management.

Third, in response to a proposal in the Governor's Budget Bill to create a career ladder for case management staff, she said that a better approach would be to encourage and support the development of core competencies among case management staff.

Fourth, she recommended legislation to develop contracting standards that better reflect the current child welfare system. She said that funds available for services do not recognize that more children are in kinship care than foster care today.

Finally, she recommended creating a system of peer support among caregiver families.

*Jonathan Boyd, Darryl Sanders, and Erika Steward, Milwaukee Youth Advisory Council.* Mr. Boyd said that he is the President of the State Youth Advisory Council. He said that he supports extended foster care to the age of 21 years to give foster youth a cushion after they reach adulthood.

Mr. Sanders said that he also supports extending the age of foster care because, when he aged out of foster care, he did not know what to do and needed employment and financial management skills.

Ms. Steward said that she is 18 and has been in foster care since 2002. She said that she does not believe that foster parents receive adequate training.

Mr. Boyd said that foster children should begin to develop skills for independent living when they are 11 years old so that they are more organized and comfortable when they need to live on their own. He said these skills include budgeting, employment, identifying funding options for education, and taking care of one's health.

In response to a question from Mr. Ray, Mr. Boyd said that foster parent training should teach foster parents to view themselves as parents, not just paid caretakers. He said that foster parents should also be trained to be caring and to try to get to the root of a foster child's issues.

Co-Chair Kestell asked if there would be conflict between an adult foster youth and a foster parent if foster care payments were available for young adults. Mr. Sanders said that he would like to at least have had the option to remain with a foster family. Mr. Boyd said it would also be very helpful to provide support for youth who age out of foster care when they first live independently.

Mr. Erdmann said that Illinois allows some youth to remain in foster care past age 18 and that it has resulted in increased graduation rates. He said that the law should not put up barriers if a foster parent is willing to allow a young adult to stay with him or her.

*Cyrus Behroozi, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, DCF*, said that the Governor's budget proposal shows his commitment to assisting DCF in improving the child welfare system in Milwaukee. For example, the proposal would appropriate \$44.6 million over the biennium to fund out-of-home care in Milwaukee County. In addition, he said that the budget proposal would increase rates paid to foster parents statewide and require foster parent training. The proposal also includes a system of graduated licenses for out-of-home care to create incentives to provide higher quality care.

Mr. Behroozi also described changes that have already been made by DCF to improve child welfare services in Wisconsin. He said that DCF has established a comprehensive review process for young children who have been in foster care for less than 10 months which includes medical evaluations of many young children. Also, DCF is conducting case practice reviews.

In response to a question from Ms. Albers relating to the case management career ladder proposal, Mr. Behroozi said that the proposal was recommended by Jess McDonald who has researched staffing issues relating to the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare and is viewed as an important recruitment and retention tool.

### **Other Business**

The next meeting of the committee will be scheduled by the Co-Chairs.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

AS:jb:jal