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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #201

Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare - Staffing (Children and Families -- Children and Families)

[LFB 2015-17 Budget Summary: Page 89, #1]

CURRENT LAW

Child welfare services in Milwaukee County are provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) through the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) under the Division of Safety and Permanence. Services are provided from a central administrative site located in the City of Milwaukee.

The BMCW access unit receives all incoming reports of possible child abuse or neglect and gathers information from the referral source. If there is reason to suspect possible child maltreatment, the access unit will screen in the referral for further review. BMCW employs initial assessment specialists, who receive referrals from the access unit, to determine: (a) if child abuse or neglect has already occurred, who did it, and the extent and the severity of the abuse or neglect if it has occurred; (b) the level of impending danger to a child in the family of future abuse or neglect; and (c) the types of services to be included in a safety plan for a child in order to prevent abuse or neglect from occurring in the future. These determinations are based on interviews with family members, home visits, and other contacts. State law requires the initial assessment investigations to be completed within 60 days of receiving the referral.

Case management services and ongoing services are provided for ongoing cases of children in out-of-home care and their families. DCF contracts with two outside vendors to provide these services: Children's Hospital of Wisconsin-Community Services and SaintA. The contract agencies are required to provide enough case managers such that there is one staff member for every 15 children. In addition, the agencies must ensure that there is one supervisor for every six staff members.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$826,000 (\$759,900 GPR and \$66,100 FED) in 2015-16 and \$1,101,200 (\$1,013,100 GPR and \$88,100 FED) in 2016-17 to fund additional staffing at BMCW. The federal funding is received under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. These federal funds are partial reimbursements for certain administrative expenses for children in the out-of-home care system. As a result, the level of federal funding is directly related to the level of state spending.

Funding of \$13,400 in 2015-16 and \$17,800 in 2016-17 would support a security contract for the BMCW offices. The remainder would support the creation of 11.0 FTE positions (10.12 GPR and 0.88 FED) in BMCW beginning in 2015-16. The increased staffing levels are provided to improve the review of cases of potential or reported child abuse and neglect.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Turnover and Assessment at BMCW

1. The following percentages of cases assessed by the BMCW initial assessments (IA) unit have been completed within the statutory 60-day timeline:

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Timely Assessment</u>
January, 2012, through June, 2012	52.1%
July, 2012, through December, 2012	56.5
January, 2013, through June, 2013	49.7
July, 2013, through December, 2013	37.4
January, 2014, through June, 2014	34.1

2. A large backlog of untimely initial assessments began to accumulate from 149 in February, 2013, up to 2,918 in June, 2014. Of these cases, 2,400 were pending for more than 90 days as of the end of June, 2014.

3. Delays in assessing reports of child abuse may result in children remaining in unsafe or abusive conditions for prolonged periods of time.

4. DCF indicates that the backlog that developed over 2013 and 2014 was due to a higher than expected caseload of screened-in referrals and an unusually high amount of employee turnover in BMCW. The following table shows how many IA specialists left BMCW in 2011 through 2014.

BMCW IA Specialist Turnover Rate

	<u>IA Specialists Leaving BMCW</u>	<u>IA Turnover Rate</u>
2011	35 out of 101.7	34.4%
2012	40 out of 101.7	39.3
2013	36 out of 101.7	35.5
2014	31 out of 101.7	30.5

5. The average caseload in BMCW was 29.6 IA cases per worker from January through June, 2013, 41.3 IA cases per worker from July through December, 2013, and 59.7 IA cases per worker from January through June, 2014. These caseload numbers reflect full-time caseworkers, and do not reflect trainees and other staff who do not work full-time caseloads.

6. The Child Welfare League of America recommends that an IA specialist have an average caseload of 12 cases. The BMCW vendor contracts for ongoing services require the vendors to maintain no more than 15 cases per worker.

7. To reduce the IA backlog in BMCW, DCF continued to recruit additional IA specialists to address the turnover issue and executed a \$550,000 contract with ACTION for Child Protection, an independent consultant, through the end of 2014. The funding for the contract came from a reallocation of funding under a different contract between DCF and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which had an existing subcontract with ACTION for Child Protection.

8. BMCW substantially increased the completion of assessments through the end of 2014. As of the end of January, 2015, there were 960 pending IA cases in BMCW which had not been timely assessed. Of these cases, 629 had been pending for more than 90 days. As of the end of March, 2015, there were 482 pending IA cases which had not been timely assessed.

9. Despite improvements in the overall number of assessments completed, statistics collected by DCF indicate that only 21.3% of reports of child abuse and neglect were timely assessed by BMCW between August, 2014, and January, 2015.

Staffing Proposal

10. As of May 5, 2015, there were a total of 97.7 FTE positions allocated to BMCW for the IA function. This amount is lower than indicated in the table above because four positions were recently transferred from the IA unit to the access unit.

11. Of the 97.7 positions, 10 are pool code positions (such as trainees who do not work full time caseloads) and 87.7 are permanent positions. As of May 5, 2015, of the total 97.7 FTE positions, 9.0 FTE were in training and therefore not carrying caseloads and an additional 18.0 FTE positions were vacant. Recruitment is currently underway to fill the vacant positions.

12. The bill would provide funding for an additional 11.0 FTE positions. Nine of these positions would be "initial assessment specialists." The positions would have a pay schedule level

ranging from a minimum of \$41,600 to a maximum of \$72,550.

13. The remaining two positions would be "initial assessment supervisors." The positions would have a salary ranging from a minimum of \$46,700 to a maximum of \$107,500. The highest allowable salary at appointment would be \$77,100.

14. Three of the positions would work in the BMCW access unit responding to incoming reports of child abuse and neglect while the remaining eight (including the supervisors) would work in the BMCW initial assessment unit investigating reports of child abuse which have been screened in by the access unit.

15. Increased staffing levels would reduce caseloads, thereby improving the review of cases and helping to address BMCW turnover rates. Increased staffing authority would also enable BMCW to maintain a staffing level that accounts for high turnover rates. Because DCF could hire and train a larger number of IA specialists, there would be a larger pool of remaining staff and trainees to take over for each IA specialist that leaves. Therefore, the Joint Committee on Finance may wish to approve the Governor's recommendation without modification (Alternative A.1).

16. On the other hand, it must be noted that BMCW currently has 14.0 vacant IA specialist positions. The Committee could therefore find that additional staffing levels are not needed (Alternative A.2).

17. Further, although the increased staffing levels may reduce IA caseloads, additional staff would not address other underlying problems that contribute to the high turnover rates at BMCW. Other issues which may affect turnover include compensation, competing offers from private employers, after-hours and on-call workloads, and work related stress. Therefore, if other causes of the high turnover rates are not addressed, increased staffing levels may result in increased vacancies without measurable improvements to BMCW performance.

18. It may, therefore, be possible to address staffing deficiencies through policies aimed at retention and recruitment. Such policies may retain experienced caseworkers who would be more proficient than hiring replacement trainees each month.

Employee Retention Policies and After-hours Compensation

19. IA and access workers use on-call or "after-hours" workers to staff BMCW during non-business hours. During weekdays, the after-hours shift is from 5:00 pm to 8:00 am. Weekends and holidays are staffed in two shifts from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm and from 8:00 pm to 8:00 am.

20. After-hours IA workers receive urgent referrals and perform initial face-to-face visits as needed. All IA cases are transferred to first-shift workers.

21. Both access and IA staff are required to sign up for a designated number of shifts. Workers have expressed difficulties in working a consecutive shift with an after-hours shift, as it leads to fatigue, a disruption in work-life balance, and an inability to work effectively.

22. The access unit has found the after-hours shift difficult to staff and difficult to work

due in part because access workers are interrupted many times during an after-hours shift.

23. BMCW IA staff receives the following under the current after-hours pay structure:

- Weeknight: one hour of salary for the on-call shift plus the worker's hourly rate when called.
- Weekends and Holidays: \$1.00 per hour for the on-call shift plus the worker's hourly rate when called.
- Supervisors and program managers receive one hour of salary on weekdays and receive \$1 per hour for the on-call shift on weekends and holidays. They receive no additional compensation when called.

24. For comparison, Fond Du Lac County IA staff are paid \$1.50 per hour on call, and then paid time and a half for work completed. Racine County IA staff receive a flat \$75 per 24 hour shift on-call, and then receive time and a half for hours worked.

25. Dane County IA staff receive one hour of their hourly rate multiplied by five for an after-hours shift on Monday through Thursday. They also get a flat payout of \$75 for any call needing field response, plus compensatory time if the field work is more than two hours in duration. For an after-hours shift on Friday through Sunday, staff receive one hour of their hourly rate multiplied by seven. On holidays, staff receives one hour of their hourly rate multiplied by nine.

26. Based on a BMCW-wide staff survey, a contributing factor to the low job satisfaction rate at BMCW is the relatively low after-hours compensation. Increased compensation could improve morale and reduce staff turnover.

27. In its agency budget request, DCF requested \$406,400 GPR and \$35,300 FED annually to fund additional after-hours compensation. The additional funding would enable the following pay structure:

- Initial Assessment Specialists and supervisors: \$125 per on-call shift for weeknights and \$150 per weekend shift and holiday, including the staff hourly rate if called.
- Program Managers: one hour of pay per shift of on-call

28. In order to allow DCF to provide for additional after-hours compensation or other enhanced employee retention policies at BMCW, the Committee could set aside funding of \$500,000 annually in its general purpose revenue funds general program supplementation appropriation (Alternative B.1). Under this alternative, DCF would be required to submit a retention plan for approval by the Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JOCER). Upon approval by JOCER, all funds would be released to DCF.

29. Alternatively, the Committee may find that it is unnecessary to provide for enhanced employee retention policies, especially if an additional 11.0 FTE positions are provided for IA specialists in BMCW. The Committee could therefore deny additional funding for retention

policies (Alternative B.2).

LTE Case Aides

30. In its agency budget request, DCF requested \$345,100 PR to fund LTE case aides to improve access and IA functions. BMCW currently uses case aides to relieve IA specialists of routine tasks. The program revenue is from child support collections for children in out-of-home care that are retained by the state to offset the costs of providing out-of-home care to those children. Due to a carryover of a preexisting balance of collections funding for 2014-15, expenditure of program revenue for case aides would not decrease funding available for Milwaukee child welfare services.

31. The Committee may wish to provide \$345,100 GPR annually to support the use of case aides while BMCW hires and trains new employees and while these new employees transition to a full-time caseload (Alternative C.1). DCF indicates that the requested funding would contribute positively to the morale and retention of BMCW staff, and allow staff to focus on critical responsibilities (such as case documentation and safety determinations). If BMCW becomes fully staffed, BMCW would reevaluate the need for case aides, which may or may not be needed depending on caseloads.

32. On the other hand, BMCW currently uses case aides as program revenue becomes available due to underspending in other areas. As a result, BMCW may be able to provide for case aides without additional funding. Further, if the Committee approves additional full-time positions, BMCW may not need the additional case aides once BMCW becomes fully staffed. Therefore, the Committee could find that it is unnecessary to provide additional funding for case aides (Alternative C.2).

ALTERNATIVES

A. Additional BMCW Staffing

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation and provide an increase of 11.0 full time staffing in BMCW.
2. Delete provision.

ALT A2	Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions
GPR	- \$1,773,000	- 10.12
FED	- 154,200	- 0.88
Total	- \$1,927,200	- 11.00

B. Enhanced Employee Retention Policies

1. Modify the Governor's recommendation to provide \$500,000 GPR annually to the

Committee's general purpose revenue funds general program supplementation appropriation for enhanced employee retention policies at BMCW consistent with the 2015-17 compensation plan adopted by JOCER. Such funding would be released to DCF upon approval by JOCER of DCF's BMCW retention plan.

ALT B1	Change to Bill
GPR	\$1,000,000

2. Deny additional funding for enhanced employee retention policies at BMCW.

C. LTE Case Aides

1. Modify the Governor's recommendation to provide \$345,100 GPR annually to fund LTE case aides to assist BMCW staff.

ALT C1	Change to Bill
GPR	\$690,200

2. Deny additional funding for LTE case aides.

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