

Testimony on Senate Bill 551
Partnership Council

Thank you Senator Vukmir and committee members.

Since the creation of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council in 1995, it has helped to build a stronger and more responsive child welfare system in Milwaukee County. This bill will allow the presiding Children's Court Judge in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee District Attorney (or designee) to be members of the Partnership Council for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

Currently, neither the court system nor the DA are required to attend. They are invited to the meetings, but do not hold a voting membership. I believe the Partnership Council will benefit greatly from the advantage of their expertise and their votes would be of great value.

The council needs a highly informed and comprehensive view of the child welfare system to continue to improve and provide excellent care to the children of Milwaukee. The addition of these seats would provide that overarching view point and allow the Council to take advantage of the considerable expertise that the DA and Children's Court Judge will bring to the table.

This bill does not increase the size of the council because the two seats were originally created for the Children's Network, which no longer exists.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 551. I would be glad to answer any questions the committee may have.



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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson
Secretary's Office

Date: February 19, 2014

To: Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee

From: Sara Buschman, Assistant Deputy Secretary

Re: Department Position on SB 551 – In Support

Senator Vukmir and Senate Health and Human Services Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 551. My name is Sara Buschman and I am the Assistant Deputy Secretary at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). With me is Fredi-Ellen Bove, the Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence within DCF.

The Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council, which was formed in 1995, serves as an advisory body to the State and as a citizen review panel for Child Protective Services (CPS) for Milwaukee County. Its mission is to aid in supporting a strong, effective, and high quality child welfare system in Milwaukee County, which is administered by the state through the Department of Children and Families Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

The Child Welfare Partnership Council meets every other month and reviews a wide range of issues related to the performance, structure, policies and programs of the child welfare and related systems. The Council solicits public input about the child welfare system and recommends to the Department of Children and Families policies and plans for improvement and funding priorities. The Partnership Council has been an important and valuable vehicle for the Department to receive input and advice from members of the Milwaukee community who have a broad range of views and expertise. We express our appreciation to the individuals who have served on the Partnership Council for devoting their time, attention, and energy to improving the lives of children and families in the Milwaukee community.

SB 551 eliminates the requirement in state law that each Wisconsin Works (W-2) agency establishes a children's services network. Many of the networks were never formed or they were dissolved over time as programs evolved and the networks were no longer needed. When this provision was adopted into state law nearly 20 years ago, the W-2 and child welfare programs were under different departments' purview. Today, both programs are under the oversight of DCF, and numerous mechanisms are in place to coordinate child welfare and W-2.

Current state law requires the Council to have two members who are nominated by a children's services network established in Milwaukee County and who are residents of the W-2 geographical area served by the network. This network was never established in Milwaukee County; as a result, the two designated spots have been vacant since the Council was established.

SB 551 changes the designation of these two positions to the presiding Children's Court Judge in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee District Attorney or designee. Both of these parties play important roles in the child welfare system. Currently, the presiding judge and the district attorney are invited to meetings, but are unable to vote on issues before the Council. Their addition will strengthen the Council by ensuring that the views of these parties are considered in the decisions and recommendations of the Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation. We thank Senator Darling and Representative Rodriguez for authoring their bill and thank the Chair for holding a hearing. We are happy to answer any of your questions.

Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council

Unless otherwise provided by law, the governor shall appoint the members of councils for terms prescribed by law. Fixed terms shall expire on July 1 and shall, if the term is for an even number of years, expire in an odd-numbered year. Unless otherwise provided by law, at its first meeting in each year every council shall elect a chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary from among its members. (15.09)

Purpose: The 19-member Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council makes recommendations to the Department of Health and Family Services and the legislature regarding policies and plans to improve the child welfare system in Milwaukee County, including a neighborhood-based system for delivery of services. It may also recommend funding priorities and identify innovative public and private funding opportunities. [15.207(24)]

Membership: The 15 non-legislative members are appointed to 3-year terms, and the governor designates one of the public members as chairperson. Three members of the Milwaukee county board nominated by the Milwaukee County executive, one representative to the assembly appointed by the speaker of the assembly, one representative to the assembly appointed by the minority leader of the assembly, one senator appointed by the president of the senate, one senator appointed by the minority leader of the senate, and ten members who are residents of the state, not less than six of whom shall be Milwaukee County residents. [15.207(24)]

Appointed by Governor: 10* (approves 5 other positions)

Number of Members: 19

Term: 3 Year

Confirmation of the Senate: No

Aligned to: DCF (15.207)

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