



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Helene Nelson, Secretary

October 2, 2006

Honorable Carol A. Roessler, Co-Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Room 8 South
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Honorable Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Room 314 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Roessler and Representative Jeskewitz:

I am pleased to provide you with the interim report on several specific items that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee requested as follow-up to the Legislative Audit Bureau Evaluation of Milwaukee County Child Welfare (Reports 06-1 & 06-2). We have made significant progress implementing the audit recommendations and expect to be in a good position to provide the Committee with a full report in February 2007, as recommended by the Audit Bureau.

We have focused significant energy and resources on effective strategies to address the complexity of issues that trouble families so that they can maintain a healthy and safe environment for their children. We have not only addressed the audit recommendations, but have also undertaken other initiatives to strengthen the work of the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW). I would like to highlight progress and plans in a few areas:

- **PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES.** Since the audit we have updated measures for the first half of 2006 from the federal Settlement Agreement approved by the Federal court. BMCW was recently released from 10 enforceable provisions identified in the Agreement by mutual agreement with plaintiffs' counsel. (This includes exceeding a standard for length of stay in out-of-home care, a topic we are addressing in more detail in this interim report per your request). This represents solid accomplishment of improved child welfare services and outcomes for children and families.
- **STAFF TURNOVER.** I am pleased to report that turnover numbers have dramatically improved for ongoing case management staff. Over time, a more experienced and stable workforce will improve the quality, continuity, and timeliness of services for children and families. The number of case management staff hired in the first six months of 2006 was 19 as compared to 73 for the first six months of 2005. The workforce is also maturing with the number of staff with six months or less experience dropping and the number with 37+ months of experience rising to nearly one-quarter of the workforce. This improvement is related to specific actions we have taken, such as salary adjustments and better training, described in more detail in the enclosed report.
- **BETTER SAFETY SERVICES.** The Department will implement new contract arrangements for Safety Services this fall, designed to assure that families receive the

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services they need for the right amount of time. This responds directly to findings and recommendations of the audit reports. Our modifications include changing the method of reimbursement to contract agencies, a topic raised by the auditors, as well as making other changes explained more fully in the enclosed report.

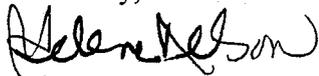
- **BMCW MANAGEMENT.** We addressed specific financial and operational management recommendations of the LAB audit previously, as you know. Since our earlier reports to you on these actions, the Department has redesigned the structure of BMCW to improve management capacity to avert similar problems in the future. In addition, we are also structuring contracts for 2007 with different financial incentives and new performance expectations for private partner agencies.
- **CONTINUING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.** BMCW is undertaking a new approach to examine performance, change outcomes, and improve quality of practice. We are implementing a new process called the Quality Service Review (QSR) to strengthen child welfare practice in Milwaukee.

BMCW is also targeting a number of specific program management areas for continuing quality improvement. These include three specific areas that are addressed in the enclosed report per your request: improved collaboration between DHFS and DWD for integrated services to families, oversight to assure timeliness of investigations, and actions to improve the timeliness of services to birth families after children are removed from their home.

The Department is working to improve several other core functions as well – for example, we are redesigning foster care and adoption services for better collaboration and stronger success in both areas through contract restructuring, and we are instituting a “medical home partnership model” that will assure foster children are receiving the health services they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to report on the progress that has been made by BMCW and its partner agencies, with the support and guidance of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council and many others who share our commitment to the safety and well-being of children and families. We thank you for your interest and support for our continuing efforts to enhance the quality of services provided to children and families in Milwaukee.

Sincerely,



Helene Nelson
Secretary

CC: Members of Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Jan Mueller, State Auditor
Special Legislative Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families

Enclosure



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
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**Interim Report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Evaluation of Milwaukee County Child Welfare (Reports 06-1 and 06-2)
October 2, 2006**

The Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) in the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) is responsible to protect children at serious risk of abuse or neglect in Milwaukee and to strengthen the ability of their families to care for them safely insofar as possible. The State has had this responsibility since 1998. Significant improvements in child welfare services have been made since that time. However, added improvements in child welfare services are needed and underway.

The Legislative Audit Bureau released two lengthy reports on the finances, management and program performance of BMCW in February 2006. The Auditors recommended and the Department agreed to report on program performance improvements in February 2007.

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee also requested an interim report from the Department in October 2006 to address several specific items. Those specific items are detailed below with Department progress reports on each item. This report supplements earlier reports we have made on progress in other areas. The items reported below show important progress, as the Department maintains its broader commitment to continual quality improvement in the critical responsibilities of BMCW. The Department appreciates the interest of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee in this important work to protect children and strengthen families.

1. *Describe any efforts between the Departments of Health and Family Services and Workforce Development to assess and address program participant needs in a collaborative manner.*

The Departments of Health and Family Services and Workforce Development have joined together through the Families Forward Initiative to improve outcomes for families involved in both systems related to increased economic security, and improved child safety and well-being. It is well documented that many of the families involved in child welfare are also W-2 recipients. DHFS and DWD are dedicated to partnering on initiatives that promote strong collaborations between the two systems at the local level.

Each agency has instituted new requirements with its private contract agencies for them to coordinate services with families. These requirements will apply county-wide to families involved in both systems. In addition, two pilot site partnerships are advancing our work in this area: Maximus/YWCA (W-2 providers) and Children's Family and

Community Partnership (CFCP) on Milwaukee's north side, and UMOS (W-2 provider) and La Causa on the south side.

On the north side, the partner agencies identify families involved in both systems and work together to assure that case plans are coordinated. W-2 workers have been trained by BMCW in the Coordinated Service Team (CST) model and when possible, attend CST meetings. A child welfare liaison employed by the W-2 agency is located at CFCP and serves as a trouble shooter for identified W-2 issues of child welfare families. The liaison also assists child welfare workers to connect to the designated Financial and Employment Planner (FEP) for a family. For families not enrolled in W-2 but possibly eligible, the liaison assists the worker to get the family assessed for eligibility. Each agency has developed and delivered in-service trainings for supervisory staff to assure each understands how the other system works. A dedicated FEP employed by the YWCA serves only families that are involved in both systems; currently the caseload is lower than that of other FEPs to allow for more time with families.

On the south side, the W-2 contract agency and child welfare partner agency have implemented a two-part initiative: in Phase 1, the two agencies have developed processes to enable child welfare staff to identify families that may be in need of W-2 services, assist them in applying for benefits, and coordinate case planning efforts. Direct service workers from both agencies have participated in training on each other's systems, in order to help them better serve families in both systems, and W-2 staff participate in CST meetings with families in Safety Services and W-2. In Phase 2, the W-2 agency (UMOS) identifies families applying for or receiving W-2 benefits who may be at risk of child abuse and neglect (using a risk assessment tool developed by child welfare staff) and refers them to La Causa for voluntary services to maintain child safety within the home. The staff from the two agencies work as a team to provide a single family plan that addresses the specific needs of each individual family, with a focus on mitigating risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

After learning from the experiences described above, DHFS and DWD, in partnership with the Department of Corrections, have expanded our collaboration in creating the Milwaukee Family Services Integration Office. This collaborative effort is designed to assist families at risk and in need of targeted services from the three departments.

The Milwaukee Family Services Integration Office will work to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families through collaboration and coordination of state-administered services in Milwaukee. The initial focus will be on integration and coordination of services among the Departments of Health & Family Services, Workforce Development and Corrections, especially to improve outcomes for families served in the W-2 and child welfare programs, and families of offenders and ex-offenders re-entering communities.

2. Respond to each of the seven recommendations made by the Child Welfare League of America in written testimony provided to the Committee on March 14th.

The Department initiated a contract with the Child Welfare League of America prior to the audits in order to gain the benefit of their advice and assistance in tackling the issue of high turnover in private contract agency staff. The Department initiated this work to reduce turnover of staff as a priority for program improvement long-term, because high staff turnover can undermine the quality, continuity, and timeliness of services to families. The Department has taken steps to implement some recommendations already and is implementing a comprehensive strategy to reduce turnover with the help of a broad-based team of public and private agency staff. This work is already showing results, with significant reduction of turnover documented in the first half of 2006.

As part of the overall strategy to retain qualified workers, BMCW established a Workforce Steering Committee in December 2005 to develop an action plan in response to the recommendations in the CWLA Workforce Report. The committee is comprised of state and private agency direct service staff, supervisors, and managers and is co-chaired by supervisors from two BMCW private agencies. Four staff workgroups were formed: 1) training and staff development; 2) mitigating compliance, standardizing practice, and motivation; 3) morale, staff recognition, organizational culture and climate; and 4) workload, documentation, and efficiency. The staff recommendations developed by the workgroups were presented to the CEOs of the private partner agencies for approval and to the Executive Committee of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council this month.

The specific recommendations made by the Child Welfare League of America and the Department's responses are outlined below.

- a) Raise the base salary for all Bureau workers by approximately 15% and provide immediate salary increases for all workers currently below that level.
 - Governor Doyle had recommended salary increases for ongoing case managers in the 2005-2007 biennial budget. After the Legislature removed the new funds to support these increases, Governor Doyle directed the Department of Health and Family Services to identify funding to support the increases from within the existing budget. The Department identified approximately \$840,000 per year for fiscal year 2006 and 2007 in available one-time revenue to support the increase in salaries. Effective September 1, 2005, salary increases were provided to case managers, mentors, and supervisors of BMCW private agencies. The Department's 2007-09 agency budget request includes funding for continuing base salary increases for on-going case managers and supervisors.

- b) Create a career ladder that encourages staff longevity and ongoing professional development in the form of additional training, certification, and educational degrees.
 - BMCW's workgroup on Training and Staff Development recommended that BMCW create Professional Development Plans (PDP) for staff to assist in the transfer of skills learned in the classroom to actual job responsibilities. The PDP breaks down the core competencies of each mandatory and foundation training attended and directly applies them to a case. In addition, the PDPs will also assist supervisors in identifying areas where staff may need additional development. The recommendation has been approved by the CEOs of BMCW private partner agencies and will be presented to the Executive Committee of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council this month.
 - A career ladder was incorporated into the salary increases. This ladder provides a pathway for workers to advance in pay and seniority depending upon educational degrees earned, longevity, and other factors.
- c) Provide more opportunities for Bureau workers to obtain MSWs on both a full-time and part-time basis. For workers who already have their degrees, provide additional internal training to enable them to expand their professional skills into specialty areas.
 - BMCW continues to work in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Helen Bader School of Social Welfare to implement a part-time Master of Social Work (MSW) program. This program is designed exclusively for state and private agency BMCW staff who want to earn their MSW degree while continuing to work full-time in Milwaukee child welfare. Classes are held each semester and during the summer and are offered at BMCW office locations in the evenings. Staff who are admitted receive full tuition (subject to the continuing availability of federal Title IV-E funds) plus an allowance for books. There is also a two-year, full-time MSW program option for BMCW staff. Participants in this program receive a stipend and a book allowance and must sign a contract to return to BMCW for at least two years after receiving their MSW.
- d) Provide significantly increased support for new workers.
 - Based on consultation with Child Welfare Associates, BMCW will implement the use of training teams to train and prepare newly hired staff. The training team experience will provide a foundation for the continued professional development of each new staff person. The training team is built on the following principles of adult learning: 1) new staff will

immediately apply what is learned through practice activities; 2) new staff progress is closely monitored, frequently evaluated and immediately addressed; and 3) staff receive extensive "hands on" experience under close supervision of a skilled training team supervisor. New case management staff will spend 4-6 months in training teams with a training team supervisor after they are hired before being assigned primary responsibility for cases.

- e) Enhance efforts to recognize staff for the quality of work they do.
 - BMCW's staff workgroup on Morale, Staff Recognition, Organizational Culture and Climate recommended that each program area within BMCW develop a staff morale and recognition plan. The plan is designed to create a supportive team environment by identifying specific outcomes that are achieved and recognizing them. Staff recognition will be tied to performance criteria. The recommendation was approved by the CEOs of private partner agencies in August 2006 and presented to the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council this month. The recommendations will be implemented within BMCW in October 2006.

- f) Continue to carefully monitor worker caseload size and consider conducting a workload study to ensure that caseloads can be managed successfully.
 - BMCW monitors ongoing case manager caseload size as one of the performance standards in the federal Settlement Agreement. BMCW must ensure that ongoing case managers have an average of 11 families per case-carrying manager per site. The overall three-month rolling average for April 2006 – June 2006 was 9.5 families per case-carrying manager. Because BMCW has met this standard for two consecutive six-month periods, we were released from this item in the Settlement Agreement by mutual agreement with plaintiffs' counsel earlier this month. On a voluntary basis, BMCW will continue to report to the community on caseload ratios.
 - BMCW's staff workgroup on Workload, Documentation, and Efficiency recommended that BMCW hire case aides to help with tasks such as driving children to therapy and doctor appointments. Funding has been identified to employ case aides. The workgroup is currently creating a job description and determining what qualifications case aides will need. This, in turn, will determine salary range. When this work is completed, the Department will assess the information about available funding, salary requirements for aide positions, and potential workload needs in order to decide the number of staff to be hired.

- g) Conduct a systematic review of documentation requirements to eliminate redundant and otherwise unnecessary paperwork.
- One item identified by the staff workgroup is the “down time” workers spend waiting at Children’s Court between hearings. Staff indicated that this time could be put to good use in completing necessary paperwork on cases. BMCW has begun distribution of over 260 wireless tablet PCs that are available for caseworkers to take in the field with them. They can be used in any setting, and enable workers to input their case notes almost immediately.
 - BMCW is in the process of reviewing all procedures to identify what documentation requirements are redundant and what may be eliminated. Within this project is a review of forms and paperwork connected to program activities.

3. Improve the timeliness of the investigations of child abuse and neglect.

The Legislative Audit Bureau identified areas of concern regarding BMCW’s response time for investigating child abuse and neglect, specifically that BMCW’s investigation time exceeded the 60 day statutory time limit. BMCW understands the importance of timely investigations and is committed to the swift completion of quality initial assessments to ensure child safety.

In response to the issues identified in the Legislative Audit report, BMCW reviewed the initial assessments that exceeded the statutory time limits. Although it is unacceptable that these initial assessments were not timely, it was determined that child safety had been assured in each of these cases and it was the documentation in the case file that was not completed in a timely manner.

BMCW has implemented corrective strategies to monitor and track the timely completion of initial assessments. Managers are receiving and using bi-monthly data reports to track case closures by supervisory work units. This information is monitored weekly during BMCW management meetings.

BMCW is seeking a change to the data system (eWiSACWIS) that allows a substantiation/unsubstantiation finding to be documented independently of the final initial assessment process. This would allow the data to show that a determination has been made in a timely manner and that the children are safe. The investigation may then continue as others related to the case are interviewed and a thorough examination of the family circumstances conducted beyond the incident that was reported.

In addition, the tablet PCs currently being distributed to BMCW staff will assist with timely documentation since staff will be able to document as they are conducting interviews.

Based on these collective strategies, we believe BMCW will continue to improve the timeliness of completed investigations.

4. Improve the timeliness of services ordered for each family when a child is removed from the home.

When a child is removed from a home, BMCW contract agencies are responsible to plan and arrange for services to the birth family that will increase the likelihood of children being able to return home and be safe there. Courts oversee and direct this process for individual families. After a court has ordered services, it is important for the contract agencies to commence birth family services as quickly as possible to provide every opportunity for safe reunification.

Service Implementation Hearings (SIH) are scheduled with Children's Court between 19 and 22 days after the detention hearing for a child. The SIH follows a Family Conference in which the family and other team members identify services that will keep their children safe. The SIH is held to report to the Court on identified needs of parents and services implemented to address safety in the home.

The courts have been clear and the Department has recognized the need to improve the timeliness of implementing these services. The following corrective strategies have been implemented to address the timely provision of services:

- a) Ongoing management meetings are held with BMCW private agency partners to discuss the status of agency efforts and to identify solutions and track progress;
- b) Monthly data reports are produced by BMCW Program Evaluation Managers to analyze outcomes, and track agency performance by family case. Follow up is done as necessary to address concerns;
- c) In collaboration with the Children's Court, issues have been identified and are being addressed that cause barriers or delays in implementing services such as attorneys who represent birth parents advising their clients not to participate in services until after a court hearing before a judge;
- d) Both private agencies have implemented improvements to their respective internal systems to expedite provider authorizations so that services can begin or continue; and
- e) BMCW notified its private agency partners in May 2006 that fiscal penalties will be imposed starting this month if they have not achieved a 90% or better compliance rate in meeting the requirements for timely implementation of services.

The Department will closely monitor the results of these actions and take other actions if necessary to achieve timely services.

5. Reduce the time children spend in out-of-home care.

The federal Settlement Agreement requires BMCW to monitor performance on the length of stay in out-of-home care (no more than 25% of children in out-of-home care shall be in care for more than 24 months). During the first six months of 2006, BMCW achieved a performance level of 18.8% of children who were in out-of-home care for more than 24 months. BMCW has successfully met the baseline performance measure as required in the Settlement Agreement for two consecutive six month periods. Thus we were released from court oversight of this item by mutual agreement with plaintiffs' counsel earlier this month.

Even beyond the Settlement Agreement, BMCW has been aggressively working with children who have been in care for 24 months or more. As a result of these efforts, the actual number and percentage of children in out-of-home care 24 months or more has decreased. The percentage of children who have been in out-of-home care for 24 or more months declined to 37% from 62.8% between January 2003 and June 2006. As of June 30, 2006, of all children in out-of-home care 24 or more months, 59% were 12 and older. BMCW is also now conducting permanency status conferences during critical times in each case (9th and 13th month) on a regular basis.

6. Ensure the adequacy of safety services.

The audit identified questions about the Safety Services program. In general, the Department believes that Safety Services have offered a viable and positive program option to keep children safely in their own homes. The Department also recognizes the concerns identified in the Legislative Audit Report and is taking measures to improve the Safety Services program.

Safety Services has been a short-term program designed as an alternative to foster care for children. Our internal review has led us to make four types of changes. First, the Department has refined its definition of who will be served to include children and families who face risks to safety that are not imminent but are likely to occur without some form of intervention. Second, the Department is modifying its payment structure to avert any incentive to artificially limit the length of services and close cases before families can safely care for their children. Third, the Department is anticipating that some subset of families will receive services longer and we are equipped to manage this reality within the existing budget. Fourth, the Department is strengthening its performance oversight of contractors in this area.

Based on the recommendation by the Legislative Audit Bureau, BMCW has changed the way its partner agencies will be reimbursed effective October 1, 2006. Rather than receiving a fixed rate reimbursement for a maximum of four months, agencies will be paid on a monthly basis for every month that a case remains open. BMCW will monitor and staff cases that are open longer than three months in order to determine the need for the case to remain open. This will ensure that each family receives the services it needs

and will avoid the risk of premature case closure, but also allow reasonable management of financial resources.

BMCW will develop and add a performance contract provision to the 2006 contracts for the Safety Services program and provide financial incentives for partner agencies to: 1) decrease the rate of recidivism; 2) decrease the entry into out-of-home care while the case is open in Safety Services; 3) decrease the incidences of maltreatment while the case is open in Safety Services and within six months of case closure; and 4) increase timely and appropriate services within a week of opening the case. BMCW will monitor performance starting with comprehensive case reviews and the Quality Service Review process.

BMCW is monitoring the agencies' corrective action plans to ensure all service providers are meeting with the family within seven days; that the Safety Services Manager meets with the family every seven days; that the Safety Services Manager completes safety assessments every seven days; and that the Coordinated Service Team meetings are held monthly. In addition, BMCW is developing reports that will allow us to closely monitor the percent of families who ceased receiving safety services and had their children enter out-of-home care within 12 months. In addition, BMCW is in the process of internally reviewing all those cases that were open in Safety Services and the children had to be placed in out-of-home care. Based on the outcome of those reviews, BMCW will take corrective measures to address any concerns or practice issues.

7. Continue to work to improve the retention of child welfare staff, including an analysis of the number of contract staff who have elected to pursue masters-level training at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee that was at least partially paid for with child welfare funding, and the number who have or have not fulfilled all terms of their education contracts.

The Department is committed to supporting child welfare staff by providing educational and other training opportunities. UW-M administers the Title IV-E program and tracks on a regular basis, which students participating in the program have left employment with BMCW. Title IV-E funds are now applied to both the full-time and part-time MSW program. Only active employment is counted toward the contractual agreement. If an employee temporarily leaves service, such as during maternity leave, the clock stops and starts again when the employee is active. Paybacks are pro-rated if employees leave before meeting their service obligation.

This program appears to be successfully meeting its goals. Since 1993, 123 students have graduated from the full-time MSW program. Ninety-six of the graduates have paid off their obligation through employment with BMCW; six paid off monetarily; two were never offered employment; and nineteen are still paying off through work. There are currently twelve students enrolled in the program who are expected to finish in August 2007. In addition, there are currently eleven students in their second year of the part-time MSW program and twenty students in their first year.

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The Department is continuing to focus attention on program and management improvement in the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. Real progress is evident in the areas reported here and in other areas. At the same time, added improvement remains needed and will be diligently sought by the Department and its private partners, who share a commitment to the safety of children and well-being of families. The Department will report again on progress to the Joint Committee on Audit in February 2007.