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MEMO

Date: February 6, 2007

TO: Members of the Special Committee on Strengthening Families

FR: Dianne Jenkins, DHFS Liaison to the Special Committee

RE: DHFS Services to Fathers

CC: Katie Plona, Legislative Liaison

This memo responds to the Special Committee's request for information on programs and/or services that address the needs of fathers. The following summarizes program areas in the Department of Health and Family Services in which there is an emphasis on engaging or otherwise involving fathers and/or paternal relatives. The information is organized by Division. Please contact me or Katie Plona, DHFS Legislative Liaison, if there are questions.

Division of Public Health (DPH)

- **Birth Certificates** – State Registrar of Deeds is directed to provide hospitals with information for parents about birth certificates, including how to add the father of a child whose parents were not married at the time of birth, and explaining the legal significance and future medical advantages to the child of having the father's name on the birth certificate.
- **Healthy Birth Outcomes** initiative – The Healthy Birth Outcomes (HBO) initiative is an effort aimed at reducing the racial and ethnic disparities in birth outcomes that exist in Wisconsin. It recognizes that when fathers are involved with their children, children fare better. An action step for the HBO initiative directs staff to “work with fathers and others to develop and support fatherhood programs in communities with high rates of disparities in birth outcomes.” Currently, DPH staff are working with the Director of the newly-created Milwaukee Family Services Integration Office and representatives of the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare to develop a coordinated approach to involve fathers in the early years of a child's life, with an initial focus on families involved in the targeted home visiting program in Milwaukee (see below).
- **Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative** – DPH regional staff in Milwaukee supported the Milwaukee Fatherhood Summit through staff work on the planning committee and with financial assistance. DPH has since assigned regional staff to work with the City of Milwaukee staff to assure ongoing coordination of efforts.
- **Home visitation project in City of Milwaukee** – Targeting high risk Milwaukee zip code areas, this targeted home visiting program, operated under contract to the City of Milwaukee Health Department, is aimed at reducing infant mortality and child abuse and neglect rates by

providing in-home support and services to high risk mothers and expectant mothers for up to five years. While initial efforts are focused on the mother and children, implementation plans include outreach to fathers and efforts are underway to provide training to the home visitors on engagement practices.

- The Division's health education outreach materials are developed to include all parents and legal guardians

Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

There is a heightened level of awareness, emphasis and commitment within child welfare to prioritize the involvement of fathers and paternal relatives across all program areas as part of day-to-day practice, based on the recognition that public child welfare has traditionally had a maternal focus. Training practices and materials emphasize the value and importance of fathers in the lives of their children and provide direction for facilitating the father-child relationship while the child is in foster care. Efforts are also targeted at assuring non-custodial fathers are informed about placement decisions and that fathers are identified for child support purposes. Examples of policies and practices include:

- The Family Interaction for Child Protective Services Cases policy provides guidance for caseworkers to include both parents in service delivery. (DCFS Memo Series 2006-2008, 3/30/06, Re: Child Welfare Family Interaction Policy)
- The Program Enhancement Plan Out-Of-Home Care Committee has developed statewide standards, guidance and tools to assist county child welfare agencies to identify, locate and involve non-custodial parents, putative fathers and paternal relatives as resources for children, especially those placed in out-of-home care. A policy and practice guide is expected to be issued in early February 2007 through the agency's Numbered Memo process.
- Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) – A subcommittee of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council is focused on developing processes for early identification and engagement of fathers when a child is involved in the child welfare system. Quality Improvement Plans address involvement of fathers and paternal relatives and their engagement in Initial Assessment, Safety Services and Ongoing Case Management. BMCW is in the process of revising staff training curricula to prepare staff to successfully engage and involve fathers and paternal relatives in each of these service areas.
- Brighter Futures Initiative – This statewide program provides funding for youth prevention activities as determined at the local level.

In Milwaukee, the following agencies are funded for specific programs related to fathers:

Sherman Park Family Resource Center – Today's Dads, a parenting support program

Vincent Family Resource Center – Nurturing Fathers groups (a 13 week parenting education and support program whose participants are recruited through the Milwaukee County Justice Resource Center), *Glad with Dad* father/child events, co-parenting communication classes

16th St. Community Health Center –Great Start, a parenting program for Spanish-speaking fathers

New Concept Self Development Center – Provides staffing assistance for the *Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative*; also operates the *George M. Sanders Father's Family Resource Center*, which assists fathers and their families to remove barriers to success through counseling, referral services and parenting and anger management classes.

The Parenting Network – parenting education and support programs, including Dads Matter and *MELD Parenting That Works*.

In other counties, related Brighter Futures – funded programs with a fatherhood component include:

Nurturing Fathers Facilitator Training – August 2005 State Prevention Conference

Racine County – *ManTalk* program, stressing “rights, respect and responsibility”

- Promoting Safe and Stable Families – This federal child abuse and neglect prevention funding source is allocated locally at the discretion of the county child welfare agency, and some counties use these funds to target father involvement activities, such as Vilas County's *Fun with Fathers Program*, which promotes father-child interactions.
- Data Exchange and System Access Agreement – This Agreement allows access to and a mutual exchange of information in the KIDS and eWiSACWIS administrative data systems for the purposes of identifying and contacting parents or putative parents of children to establish paternity and potential placement, prepare cases for court action, and/or make child support referrals in out-of-home cases. (DCFS Memo Series 2006-19, 9/19/06, Re: Data Exchange and System Access Agreement Between DHFS and DWD)
- Paternal Interest Registry Program (WI Act 293) Administered by DCFS, this program offers guidance to non-custodial fathers on how to ensure they receive notification if their child is involved in a termination of parental rights court action. (DCFS Memo Series 2006-07, 9/26/06, Re: 2005 Act 293 – Changes Impacting Inquiries Concerning Declarations of Paternal Interest.)

Division of Disability and Elder Services (DDES)

- Strengthening Families Program – This is an evidence-based program, recently implemented in Wisconsin, aimed at families affected by methamphetamine abuse. Funds are used to train and support program facilitators to work with parents to strengthen parenting skills and is aimed at parents of youths age 10 – 14. Funded with Substance Abuse Block Grant in several counties in western Wisconsin.

