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September 7, 2007

Honorable Steve Kestell  
Chair, Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families  
PO Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Chair Kestell:

Due to other commitments, I regret my absence at the July 30, 2007 meeting of the Legislative Council Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families. Although attendance at committee meetings is not always possible, I have been following the proceedings on the committee's Web site, through discussions with our county partners that serve on the committee, as well as on *Wisconsin Eye*.

The special committee devoted several hours at its last meeting discussing WLC: 0075/4, regarding coordinated service teams. During the discussion, you mentioned the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) several times and even surmised what our position may be on the bill draft. You indicated that the counties association "are not going to play," "will play hardball," and "will say that one and a half is not enough." These statements do not reflect the position of the Wisconsin Counties Association on the bill draft.

The Wisconsin Counties Association values its partnership with county human services directors across the state. We look to them for input on legislation affecting the delivery of human services at the county level, seek their advice on best practices, and work through the Wisconsin County Human Service Association to develop a legislative agenda that meets the needs of human services departments statewide. Based on their counsel, the Wisconsin Counties Association in fact supports WLC: 0075/4 as it promotes best practice, funds its implementation and does not impose a mandate on county human services departments.

WCA is rather surprised that this bill draft is not moving forward after committee discussion. Committee members and Legislative Council staff spent numerous hours developing a bill draft that serves the children and families of this state and provided the committee with an excellent work product. No one on the committee indicated disagreement with the expansion of coordinated service teams statewide. While I do recognize there is a fiscal note associated with this legislation, it is to the detriment of children and families in Wisconsin to not move the bill forward for further discussion. At the very least, the committee should take affirmative action to encourage DHFS, the Governor and members of the Joint Finance Committee to insert the bill in the 2009-11 biennial state budget, as well as move the legislation to the full Joint Legislative Council for further consideration.

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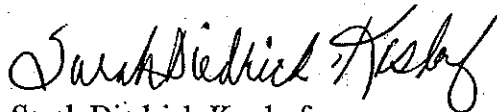
Child welfare is one of the many programs operated by county government on behalf of the state. In 71 of the state's 72 counties, counties respond to reports of child abuse and neglect, work with families to create environments that are safe for children, and when necessary, place children outside of their homes with the goal of family unification, if appropriate. Wisconsin is in the minority of states that operate human services/child welfare programs at the local level.

As with most mandated programs, state funding is inadequate to provide the services required under current federal and state laws, as well as administrative rule. Community aids is the primary source of state and federal funding to counties for child welfare services. In FY 07, counties will receive approximately \$262 million in community aids. However, community aids funds not only child welfare programs, but services for the developmentally disabled, aged populations and individuals suffering from mental illness. Only a small percentage of community aids dollars received by counties is dedicated to child welfare programming (\$28.2 million in federal Title IV-E funds are budgeted in the community aids BCA; \$3.4 million under Title IV-B). A survey conducted by DHFS found that counties spent \$416.8 million in county tax levy for human services in calendar year 2004, an amount well above the required match.

When the state began operating the child welfare program in Milwaukee County, the lack of state funding for child welfare services in Wisconsin was readily apparent. State funding for child welfare services in Milwaukee County increased by \$40 million in the first biennium; the remaining 71 counties did not receive an increase. In the budget bill currently before the state legislature, an \$11 million increase is proposed for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare; community aids funding remains stagnant. I do not believe that the \$1.4 million requested for coordinated services teams is too much to ask for to assist children in need of services in this state. A small investment in the lives of children today goes a long way in ensuring a healthy, safe and productive future for upcoming generations.

WCA looks forward to the work of the special committee and hopes in the future there are no misconceptions about our position on the committee's work. In addition, WCA respectfully requests that WLC: 0075/4 be placed on the next committee agenda for further consideration.

Sincerely,



Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf  
Senior Legislative Associate

cc: Members, Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families  
Laura Rose, Deputy Director, Wisconsin Legislative Council