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## WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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### STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Legislative Council Conference Room  
Madison, Wisconsin

June 18, 2007  
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the June 18, 2007 meeting of the Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families. The file copy of this summary has appended to it a copy of each document prepared for or submitted to the committee during the meeting. A digital recording of the meeting is available on our Web site at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lc>.]

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#### Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Kestell called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The roll was called and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Rep. Steve Kestell, Chair; Rep. Don Pridemore; Sens. Dale Schultz and Lena Taylor; and Public Members Jon Angeli, Lisa Boyd-Gonzalez, John Burgess, Charity Eleson, Carol Kelso, Jodi Roberts, Paula Roberts, Jack Westman, and Carol Wright.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Rep. Donna Seidel; and Public Members Paul Minkus and Kenneth Munson.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Laura Rose, Deputy Director; Anne Sappenfield, Senior Staff Attorney; and Scott Grosz, Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Al Holmes, Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative; Marc Ackerman, Ph.D., Psychologist; Lucy Cooper, Family Court Commissioner (retired), Milwaukee; and Joe Sciascia, Family Court Commissioner, Dodge County.

#### Approval of the Minutes of the March 19, 2007 Meeting

*Jon Angeli, moved, seconded by Charity Eleson, to approve the minutes of the March 19, 2007 meeting of the Special Committee. The motion was approved by a voice vote.*

## **Presentation by Invited Speakers**

*Al Holmes, Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative*, addressed the committee and offered remarks regarding issues related to the needs of fathers. Mr. Holmes described employment as the biggest hurdle facing fathers and noted the relative inability of under-educated fathers to direct resources to their children. He also noted that many men who participate in underground economies support their children; however, that support often goes unrecorded. Mr. Holmes stated that he felt current systems, including the court system and W-2, perpetuate unfair outcomes for fathers.

Mr. Holmes responded to questions from committee members. Generally, committee members sought suggestions for policy changes that would benefit fathers. Mr. Holmes suggested that the state should not use child support arrearages as a source of income. He noted that male participants in W-2 face more hurdles than female participants. He also suggested that it would be good policy to address the inaccurate perception that payment of child support is a condition to child visitation. Additionally, he suggested that the state should enforce child visitation with the same intensity that it enforces payment of child support.

*Marc Ackerman, Ph.D., Psychologist*, described his background as a psychologist with considerable experience working with issues related to divorce and child placement. He noted that in his work, his first priority is to be a child's advocate. Mr. Ackerman provided a brief overview of research and statistics regarding child placement. In particular, he noted that no research has supported 50/50 physical placement as a mandate or as a starting point in contested cases. He noted that current standards generally consider "substantially equal placement." However, that concept does not necessarily require equal placement in terms of quantity. Generally, Mr. Ackerman stated that a 50/50 physical placement default may be flawed since the common causes of contested child placement cases are often the same issues that may be strong evidence against physical placement of a child with a particular parent.

*Lucy Cooper, Family Court Commissioner (retired), Milwaukee*, offered her reaction to the use of 50/50 physical placement as a starting point in contested divorce cases. She noted that the judicial system deals with a range of parents including those with no relationship to those that live together and act as parents. She suggested that a 50/50 physical placement default may have unintended consequences with regard to substantial portions of the spectrum of parents who are involved in the judicial system. She also noted that current law directs a court to maximize placement, and that past performance is a very good indicator of future behavior with regard to parenting. She also noted that many families would have great difficulty in affording the housing and other expenses associated with a 50/50 physical placement arrangement.

*Joe Sciascia, Family Court Commissioner, Dodge County*, offered his observations regarding child placement. He noted that courts see the bad side of people, that a child's best interest is a good compass for placement, and that parents often do not have equal parenting skills. He also noted that when parents initially agree on equal time placement plans, they often return to court having found those plans to be undesirable or difficult to implement.

### **Discussion of Committee Assignment**

Chair Kestell noted that the committee may not be ready to decide on its course of action with regard to options related to child placement. The committee proceeded to discuss other areas of interest.

Laura Rose, provided an update on WLC: 0075/3, relating to coordinated service teams. She said that the bill draft will be discussed in detail at the next meeting.

Scott Grosz, provided a procedural update on the bill draft recommended by the committee relating to adult basic education and said that the bill will be introduced soon.

Chair Kestell commented on the budget process and the proposed Department of Children and Families. He said that the committee should continue to monitor the establishment of the department.

Mr. Grosz provided additional information regarding transportation issues discussed at prior meetings. The committee discussed issues related to driver license suspension and occupational licenses and whether there was a need to revise the law relating to eligibility for an occupational license and authorized vehicle operation under an occupational license. Mr. Grosz said that he would prepare options for legislation for the committee to consider at its next meeting.

### **Other Business**

There was no other business before the Special Committee at this time.

### **Plans for Future Meetings**

The next meeting will be held on *Monday, July 30, 2007, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 411 South, State Capitol, Madison.*

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

SG:ty