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## WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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### STRENGTHENING WISCONSIN FAMILIES

Legislative Council Conference Room  
Madison, Wisconsin

September 26, 2006  
10:00 a.m. – 2:40 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the September 26, 2006 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. Carol Roessler and Dale Schultz; and Public Members Jon Angeli, Lisa Boyd-Gonzalez, John Burgess, Charity Eleson, Carol Kelso, Paul Minkus, Jodi Roberts, Paula Roberts, and Jack Westman.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Rep. Donna Seidel; Sen. Lena Taylor; and Public Members Norm Brickl and Kenneth Munson.

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

APPEARANCES: Janice Mueller and Paul Stuiber, Legislative Audit Bureau; and Dr. Mark Courtney, The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

#### Approval of the Minutes of the August 29, 2006 Meeting

*Mr. Burgess moved, seconded by Mr. Angeli, to approve the minutes of the August 29, 2006 meeting of the Special Committee. The motion was approved by a voice vote.*

## Description of Materials Distributed

Laura Rose noted that an Act Memo describing 2005 Wisconsin Act 467, which created the Special Committee on Strengthening Wisconsin Families, had been sent out to members prior to the meeting. She also noted that the following three items had been distributed at the meeting at the request of the Department of Health and Family Services:

- Issue Brief, *Improving Access to Benefits for Low-Income Families*; NGA Center for Best Practices (August 31, 2006).
- Handout, *Who Returns to Welfare*; The Urban Institute (September 2002).
- Letter from Secretary Helene Nelson responding to the Legislative Audit Bureau Report on the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

## Presentations by Invited Speakers

[Note: PowerPoint presentations and other documents referred to by the speakers are posted on the committee's Internet site.]

**Janice Mueller**, State Auditor, Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB), provided information to the committee on Legislative Audit Bureau Report 05-6, *An Evaluation of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) Program* dated April 1, 2005. Ms. Mueller presented a PowerPoint program highlighting the major findings from the audit that relate to characteristics of individuals participating in W-2; extension granted to W-2 participants; W-2 program performance, as it relates to economic status of persons leaving W-2 and program participation of those in W-2; and program management concerns, including excess payments and screening for barriers for employment.

Paul Stuiber, LAB, presented a PowerPoint program on LAB reports 06-1 and 06-2, released in February 2006, evaluating the Milwaukee County Child Welfare System. The audits examined both program issues and finances and staffing. Mr. Stuiber provided an historical overview of Milwaukee child welfare expenditures; the process for intake disposition; the investigation process; the rate of out-of-home care placement of children; the provision of safety services; the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare's response to high-risk cases of child abuse and neglect; allowable costs and cost overruns; staff turn-over; and future challenges facing the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

Following the LAB presentation, committee members asked questions relating to oversight of W-2 and Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare contracts; outcome measures applicable to service providers; what barriers to employment exist among W-2 clients; what happens to individuals leaving the W-2 program; confusion over the primary goal of the W-2 program (reducing poverty or finding employment for participants); and the difficulties inherent in strengthening families while workforce attachment among parents is tenuous.

**Dr. Mark Courtney**, The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, presented data from a long-term study he conducted which compares the W-2 and child welfare populations in Milwaukee. Dr. Courtney presented extensive data on characteristics of the W-2 and child welfare populations and noted that there is a significant overlap of factors that predict problems

with finding employment with factors that predict a person's involvement with the child welfare system. One item shows that 63.8% of Milwaukee Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applicants had been investigated for alleged child maltreatment. Committee discussion and questions followed Dr. Courtney's presentation. Questions to Dr. Courtney included how to improve integration between the child welfare and W-2 systems; addressing poverty as a means of reducing child abuse and neglect; and the use of intensive prevention services, such as home visitation services, in helping to strengthen families.

After a short lunch break, Chair Kestell led the committee in a discussion of committee member priorities for committee study. Committee suggestions included the following:

- Increasing the involvement of both parents in their childrens' lives.
- Integrating the work and the goals of various agencies that work with families.
- Assisting families in becoming more economically secure in order to improve family well-being.
- Focusing on prevention services that target the chief contributing factors of families who are struggling.
- Finding out what programs in Wisconsin work in terms of strengthening families.
- Getting feedback from consumers about what types of services would work for them; and encouraging grass roots community efforts that assist in strengthening families.

### **Other Business**

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

### **Plans for Future Meetings**

Chair Kestell stated that staff would send out a list of potential meeting dates for the next three months and that the October meeting date would be set as soon as possible. Subsequently, the committee scheduled meetings for *Tuesday, October 24, 2006, at 10:00 a.m., in the Legislative Council Conference Room; Tuesday, November 21, 2006, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 411 South, State Capitol, and Tuesday, December 12, 2006, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 411 South, State Capitol.*

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

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