

Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services Coalition

“Strengthening the capacities of families to provide safe and healthy environments for their children”

Public Policy Committee

PUBLIC COMMENTS TO LEGISLATURE’S CHILDREN’S CAUCUS

March 13, 2017

We ask you to carefully consider our concerns about the crises and stresses faced by families when trying to meet their basic needs, particularly for housing. We also emphasize the value of child abuse and neglect prevention services that support and preserve families.

Members of the Public Policy Committee of the Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services Coalition are health and social service providers, advocates, community volunteers, and staff of public assistance agencies who regularly work with low-income families. Many committee members work directly with families in child abuse and neglect prevention and family support programs.

We believe that adequate income and supports to families are tools for preventing child abuse and neglect.

Basic Needs

It is nearly impossible to ensure the safety of children if they and their parents do not have access to adequate housing and sufficient cash for rent, clothing, and household goods.

Based on the experience of many members of the Public Policy Committee who work directly with families, the instability and stress caused by the lack of access to housing and the dearth of affordable housing is a severe problem in Milwaukee and other parts of the state. Instability in housing creates risk to the safety of children. For example, when families must “double-up” with others, children are vulnerable to sexual abuse as well as other forms of abuse and neglect.

While Emergency Assistance helps some families meet the immediate need for housing, this only satisfies this need in the short term. It is crucial to provide the kind of housing resources, such as vouchers, to families that will house them over the long term.

Since the passage of welfare reform, many families are living without enough cash to pay for basic needs. As at other times in the past, the W-2 caseload has declined since the beginning of 2016, likely leaving some families without any access to cash. The number of people receiving Food Share and reporting no income has steadily increased over time. Additionally, many working parents do not earn enough to have adequate cash to afford the housing and other goods needed for their families. While assistance such as Food Share and Badgercare provide necessary safety supports for children and families, these programs do not provide cash which is essential to functioning in today’s economy, especially to purchase housing, clothing, and household goods.

Without adequate cash for housing, clothing, and household goods for their families, children are vulnerable to placement in the child welfare system. The cost of such an outcome is greater than the cost of preventative efforts.

Direct Services for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention:

Given the value of prevention services in saving money in future costs to productivity, health care, and corrections, we support funding for prevention programs in Milwaukee and statewide. Estimates find that for every dollar spent on prevention services, as little as three and as much as eight dollars is saved in costs in other more costly intervention programs and services over time.

We hope that members of the Children's Caucus will support evidence-based, intensive home visiting, quality parent education, trauma-informed care and other such efforts for child abuse and neglect prevention.

We recommend that the Children's Caucus support the continuation of promising programs for the prevention of child abuse and neglect such as Project GAIN and the Community Response. It seems that too often programs are introduced as a pilot and then discontinued before the benefits can be realized over the long term. A commitment from you to continue such programs would be a concrete demonstration of keeping a promise made to meeting the needs of families and keeping children safe.

As members of the state legislature, you are responsible for authorizing the state budget. Consequently, you can promote and support budget provisions that increase access to various means of housing assistance, such as housing vouchers. You can also support access to cash assistance that can be used for other basic needs. You can support an increase in Emergency Assistance. There are both federal and state funds that can be used for such measures.

You can also support funding for child abuse and neglect prevention services, particularly those that are evidence-based and trauma-informed. You can support long term funding for promising programs that began as pilots.

Respectfully submitted:

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