**Leadership Council on Early Years (LCEY)**

**Meeting Minutes**

**DRAFT Pending Approval**

February 22, 2023

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

**YouTube Link:** <https://youtube.com/live/u7gMBlLo1lE?feature=share>

**Members Present:** Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez, First Lady Kathy Evers, Emilie Amundson (Secretary, DCF), Kathy Blumenfeld (Secretary, DOA), Linda Hall (Executive Director, OCMH), Rebecca Murray (Executive Director, CANPB), Cheryll Olson-Collins (Secretary, DFI), Amy Pechacek (Secretary, DWD), Dr. Jill Underly (DPI State Superintendent)

**Others Present:** Kathey Bilek (DOT), Jessica Boling (WHEDA), Andrea Cammilleri (DCF), Curtis Cunningham (DHS), Arielle Exner (DWD), Jennifer Fahey (DVA), Evan Golden (CANPB), Joey Hoey (DVA), Brian Jones (DVA), Jessica Justman (DCF), Sara Knueve (DPI), Justin Koestler (Lieutenant Governor’s Office), Tracy Luber (WEDC), Julie Majerus (DNR), Margaret McMahon (DCF), Duy Nguyen (DPI), Jane Penner-Hoppe (DCF), Melissa Roberts (DOC), Gary Russell (DOR), Jeremy Simon (DWD), Elizabeth Valitchka (DCF), Stephanie Weix (Office of First Lady)

**Welcome, Introductions**

* A general roll call was conducted to identify the agencies and departments in attendance. Members were asked to share a childhood memory of snow days.
* Secretary Amundson recalled the reasons this council was established in February 2020. She reminded the participants of the accelerated work that was accomplished in creating stronger families and communities through the combined efforts and strategic connections made across State agencies represented in this Council. She discussed the services, programs, and ideas shared and learned from one another in this partnership.
* Secretary Amundson introduced the newest LCEY member, Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez.

**Welcome Remarks and Connecting the Dots for Wisconsin Kids and Families**

Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez expressed her excitement in advancing the Governor’s vision of using government and services to help Wisconsin’s kids and families thrive. She spoke of the Governor’s budget (released on February 15) as “breakthrough” and one which invests in kids, communities and prevention. She briefly highlighted a number of Governor Evers’ priorities. Ms. Rodriguez is a public health nurse by trade. She hopes to shine a light on the positive work government is doing.

**“What’s Best for Our Kids is What’s Best for Our State:” Agency Share-Out Discussion of Budget Priorities Aligned with the Governor’s Vision**

A round robin share-out took place. Agencies were asked to highlight one or more of their budget priorities/initiatives which focused on or impacted children and families.

* **DCF** focused on the Child Care Counts program, which was established during the pandemic to afford child care providers financial stability and allow for the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators. Funding is expected to end in January 2024. Continued support of this program through a state investment is said to be critical to the workforce and the economy. Secretary Amundson also cited budget asks for, among others, the Partner Up! program, early childhood mental health supports, an electronic child care licensing process, and data program modernization projects for the child welfare and child support systems.
* **WEDC** looks to secure flexible funding in a block grant to allow for continued support of innovative solutions to child care.
* **DOR** spoke of expected increases in property tax relief through lottery proceeds and showed support of the Governor’s efforts to dedicate 20 percent sales tax for shared revenue.
* **DWD** discussed a proposed increase in funding for the Workforce Innovation Grant program, which was established to drive solutions to post-pandemic workforce challenges. Assistant Deputy Secretary Jeremy Simon also showed excitement for anticipated expansions to the FMLA program and the possible creation of a paid FMLA program in Wisconsin.
* **DNR** – Julie Majerus, Wisconsin’s first policy advisor dedicated solely to environmental justice, highlighted the 2-year action plan which allocates funding for grants to test and remediate contaminated sites and to promote safe drinking water through lead line service replacement. Ms. Majerus also mentioned suggested improvements and increased access to parks, with intentional enhancements for disabled visitors.
* Secretary Blumenfeld reviewed four key areas in **DOA** that the Governor’s budget supports with multiple provisions—increased wages and added benefits for a strong and resilient state workforce, new and expanded programs and services to aid homelessness prevention efforts and to create more affordable housing options, investments in community healthcare infrastructure programs throughout the state, and energy cost assistance in compromised areas.
* She highlighted the Neighborhood Development Grant program that funded an initiative in Wausau that is bringing together several services supported by DOA under the same roof to help families access a variety of services, all in one place. Partnering with local community action and schools, the location referenced in Wausau, the Community Partners Campus provides a single location for the provision of a wide range of human services by offering functional, collaborative, shared-space facilities for its nonprofit partners, all of which have mission-driven purposes to serve disadvantaged individuals and families in the greater Wausau area. Services provided include a diaper bank, food pantry, …
* **DVA** eagerly shared the budget proposal to significantly increase support of the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program, which provides mental health and substance abuse services to veterans, reducing suicide and homelessness.
* Executive Director Rebecca Murray shared the **Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB)’**s vision of ensuring every child in Wisconsin grows up in a safe, stable and nurturing environment. She highlighted the funding for Family Resource Centers (FRCs), included in the Governor’s budget. FRCs are community or school-based hubs which offer prevention and family-strengthening activities and services reflective of the community and the needs of the community in which they live.
* **The Office of Children’s Mental Health (OCMH)**, as explained by Executive Director Linda Hall, is charged with working across the departments of the state, aligning efforts to improve children’s mental health. OCMH is represented in the budget with a recommendation to bring together cross-agency staff who work directly with youth to develop a Youth Wellness Network. This collaborative team will ultimately identify youth to staff a youth-lead council in which to represent the youth voice.
* **DHS** enlightened the council with an array of improvements and added services and programs available through Medicaid expansion and the increased federal revenue received from the rise in federal poverty levels. Curtis Cunningham discussed community health supports, dental coordination efforts, telehealth consultation sites, behavioral health services, and FoodShare opportunities, just to name a few.
* **DPI** discussed the importance of sustainable and increased spending authority for schools and programs to support strong educators, paid family leave, and the adoption of free care rule for Medicaid.
* The Governor’s budget seeks to increase spending authority for **DFI** to help the department restore previous cuts. This investment is said to allow DFI to continue funding programs that help teachers promote financial literacy, provide student debt assistance, offer debt relief workshops, provide information to increase savings and/or to save for higher education. The council was told of two initiatives—the creation of a retirement savings program for employees of small businesses that do not offer this benefit and the implementation and administration of ABLE, a tax-exempt savings account for individuals with disabilities.
* **WHEDA** looks to expand state housing tax credits to stimulate the development of additional, affordable rental units within the state. The budget also proposes an increase in the Workforce Housing Rehabilitation Loan program, with the goal of stabilizing communities, families and prices.

Secretary Amundson thanked the council for providing this comprehensive budget-in-brief, an accumulation of the programs and services offered throughout the different agencies in Wisconsin to strengthen children and families. She encouraged members to continue to make the natural connections/intersections within the state in support of each other’s priorities.

**Wrap-up and Next Steps**

Secretary Amundson shared the recommendations made to the Governor by the Early Childhood Advisory Council in December—continued funding for Child Care Counts, more supports for home visiting and infant mental health, and infrastructures/supports for FRCs. This council is comprised primarily of external stakeholders and professionals in the field of early care and education.

* Secretary Amundson announced the third round of DCF’s Dream Up! grant program. This program is designed to expand and create new child care programs by supporting innovation and growth at the community level.
* Another round of the Partner Up! program will be coming soon, thanks to DCF’s partnership with DWD and the QUEST grant.
* The next LCEY meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 1, 9 am - 11 am.