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Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services

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**MILWAKEE CHILD WELFARE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL**  
**Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services**  
**635 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233**

**Friday, September 29, 2017**  
**12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

**MEETING MINUTES**

*Approved by the Council on January 26, 2018.*

**1) Welcome and Introductions, Mark Mertens, Chair**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Mark Mertens. Introductions were made around the room and attendance was taken.

**Members Present:** Mark Mertens, Christine Holmes, Anthony Staskunas, Tony Shields, Willie Johnson, Jr., Delvyn Crawford, Libby Mueller, Jessie Rodriguez, Jocasta Zamarripa, LaTonya Johnson.

**Members Absent:** Joe Donald, Alberta Darling, Steve Taylor, Mallory O'Brien, Susan Gadacz, Veneshia McKinney-Whitson, Carey Courtney, Marshall Murray, Steve Gilbertson (Non-voting), Maria Rodriguez (Non-voting).

There were 10 of 18 voting members present, constituting a quorum.

**2) The Chair informed the Council of the ways in which the meeting was publicly noticed:**

First, the notice of the meeting was published in the Wednesday, September 27, 2017 edition of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Second, the notice was faxed to the newspaper of record for the State of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin State Journal, on Wednesday, September 27, 2017. The notice was emailed to the Partnership Council stakeholders including any media who had requested such notice on Monday, September 25, 2017. Finally, the agenda was posted on the front door of the DMCPs building at 635 N. 26<sup>th</sup> St. on September 27, 2017. This satisfies the requirements for notice under Wis. Stat. 19.84(1)(b).

**3) Review and Approval of Past Minutes, Mark Mertens, Chair**

Christine Holmes moved approval of the May 19, 2017 meeting minutes and Libby Mueller provided a second. The minutes were approved without amendment. The vote was unanimous.

**4) Settlement Report: January – June 2017**

**a. Presentation of Settlement Data**

Hannah Knouse from the Bureau of Performance Management, navigated a PowerPoint presentation and explained data from the Settlement Report.

**b. Response – Plaintiff's Counsel**

Eric Thompson, Children's Rights, Inc., responded to the Settlement Report presentation. The following is a summary of his comments:

- Looking at page 10, it is outstanding that 92% of children are being seen timely for their 5-day initial health screens, but we need to continue to work on this.
- Also on page 10, we have 92% of children receiving their annual medical exam timely is an improvement and something to be proud of.
- Stability is the next major component. Looking at page 5, we need to limit the number of moves that children are subjected to within care. The measure calls for at least 90% of children to have had 3 or fewer moves – we are at 87% and this continues to be an area of challenge. The agency has put numerous efforts into place to tick this up. Happy to see this is up from 86%. We've been at 88% in the past so this is doable. This remains last legally enforceable measure. We must continue instilling in everyone the critical importance of placement stability and how it affects the end outcomes for children.
- The next area I would focus on is permanence. As professionals, we all know that attaining a permanent placement is critical. The key is to get to that permanent solution in an expedited and efficient manner. Looking at page 7, item I.B.4., the numbers here are very low because they are skewed against the children that were in care at the time of the lawsuit. It is reported here at 13%, but that is based on having 5,533 children in care. We actually only have about 2,000 in care today. So, actually, 1/3 of children have been in care for 24+ months. It's not necessarily where we want to be, but it is better than where we were at at one point.
- I also focus on page 7, item 1.B.7. – Adoptions within 24 months. Milwaukee has been quite successful over the years to help children get adopted within 24 months of coming into care. For the first time within the 6 month measure, we are down below the performance standard in this case. It is worth flagging this and inquiring as to why this is happening. I flag this as an issue that I am concerned about.

- On page 7, item 1.B.6. – Reunifications within 12 months - The reason this is important is because research shows that children that are going to be reunified have better outcomes if the reunification happens in less than 12 months. The flip side is on page 10 of your report... reentry is at 6% - this is a measure of how many we tried to reunify and it was not a positive exit; something failed and they had to come back.
- Looking at page 10, caseloads are averaging 13 cases per caseworker. But the bad news is that as of June, 25% of caseworkers at CHWCS and 66% at SaintA had over 15 kids on their caseloads. This clearly needs to be addressed.
- In 2014 we were at 59% turnover for ongoing caseworkers. Here we are at 21% for half the year – we will be at over 40% for the rest of the year – it is an issue that is being addressed, but an ongoing issues.”

**c) Council Discussion**

Christine Holmes asked of the division, “Even though it is not enforceable through the settlement – can we assume that there are corrective action plans in place – Are those addressed at all within the division?” DMCPs responded affirmatively that the measures are being watched and attention is giving to continue improving.

Libby Mueller offered to address the adoptions piece of the discussion. *The following is a summary of her comments:* “In the last 9 months there has been a significant number of appeals for the TPR case appeals. They have almost doubled. We’re filing a few less – but our local court of appeals district is having to farm out the appeals to other districts... We don’t finalize adoptions until appeals are done. They are extremely time consuming - it is 9 months to a year before decided. They are expedited – there is a notice of appeal sent out, and asking for a new hearing at circuit court adds 4 months to the timeline. I don’t see that number subsiding or getting better for the foreseeable future. The other end is that adoptions aren’t happening within 24 months – that is almost impossible to do – I’m shocked that we do as well as we have so far. I have lots of ideas as how we can help that along... we can change our laws to get to TPR sooner. We can use that to get a few months on the front end – but the way the law is written, they are already being expedited. I even have draft bills written.”

Jessie Rodriguez commented that the Assembly Speaker’s Task Force on Foster Care would be having a hearing in Milwaukee and it would be useful if anyone with ideas would come testify.

Christine Holmes asked about 58% percent of kids in care for up to 12 months being reunified and noting that a case is not settled until a trial reunification is complete. Randall Keys, Attorney for the Division, cited that for reporting purposes, a trial reunification is still considered an out of home placement.

**d) Response – Ongoing Agencies**

Alison McMorrow, SaintA and David Whelan, CHWCS responded to the Settlement Report presentation.

- Alison McMorrow gave a staff update that SaintA is fully staffed with 106 filled / 106 available case carrying positions.
- David Whelan explained that UWM added an additional training cycle.
- David Whelan explained that family drug treatment court received a grant and both SaintA and CHWCS are partners in the process and looking to standardize how they assess the needs of those kids. They are trying to fit that within the requirements of the families in that court.
- Alison McMorrow explained that they also collaborate in healthy infant court, helping a parent to understand how to follow a child's cues. There has always been a grant within that process and it builds a bridge beautifully with Quality Parenting Milwaukee and foster parent recruitment.
- David Whelan described another initiative, the Milwaukee County Trauma Informed Partnership, which is a collaboration built off of a 2015 initiative. The parties involved include SaintA, CHWCS, Wraparound Milwaukee, DMCPs, the legal parties that get involved at court, and the leadership of Judge Donald. "If we are going to be successful, we have to acknowledge that the work is slow and we must be persistent. We have launched a trauma informed care lunch & learn – we had the first one earlier this month and it was fairly well attended. We also have the famous newsletters to help address trauma. It's one thing to understand how trauma impacts clients, but it's another thing to invest in changing it."
- David Whelan spoke about placement stability and noted that the agencies are more effective when they come to the table and work together. They are now looking at indicators about how they are doing individually and trying to learn from each other. For example, SaintA has an early indicator for placement stability and CHWCS has made a focused effort to learn from that system.

5) **Committees, Mark Mertens, Chair**

**a. Health & Education Committee, Christine Holmes**

- The next committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at noon. The topic is going to be children's mental health and considering the barriers to getting children in early.
- The committee also gets reports from the education liaison, who helps with parent meetings, ensuring educational needs are being met.

**b. Critical Incident Committee, Mallory O'Brien**

At the most recent meeting, the CIC staffed critical incidents such as infant deaths that had recently occurred. "Pack and Plays" were discussed along with baby boxes. Pack and plays are often available or present in the home, but not always used.

**Recommendation:** The committee sends the following recommendations to the full Partnership Council for consideration as a recommendation to changes in policy and practice:

- ***"We recommend that the state consider amending the state standards to include a time frame for case plan completion once permanency has been achieved through reunification."***
- ***"We recommend that DMCPs work with the Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) to review factors involved in co-sleeping deaths."***
- Libby explained that the first recommendation had to do with when the case plan had not been completed but the reunification had been completed. This committee cannot fix that situation – but we can change state standards by making a recommendation.
- The committee also looked at commonalities between infant deaths so instead of having two separate groups, they wanted to see the groups FIMR working together.
- Libby explained that when the DA's office staffs those cases, there is an AODA issue in every household.
- The text of the recommendations was amended to change from using the word "we" (indicating the committee) to "The Council" to clarify that the recommendation comes from the full council. This amendment was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.
- On both recommendations, as amended, Libby moved approval and Christine seconded. The approval vote was unanimous. The approved recommendation is:

- ***"The Council recommends that the state consider amending the state standards to include a time frame for case plan completion once permanency has been achieved through reunification."***
- ***"The Council recommends that DMCPs work with the Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) to review factors involved in co-sleeping deaths."***

**c. Ad-Hoc Planning Committee, Mark Mertens**

Mark Mertens discussed the role of the council – and its dual role as a citizen review panel. He discussed that the council needs to establish how it sees itself, as oversight or facilitative. The group has in the past discussed having a retreat and planning for that but for various reasons a meeting to discuss this in depth did not occur.

**6) Discussion on Citizen Review Panel (CRP) Committee, Mark Mertens**

The Council held discussion of a proposal to create an ad-hoc or permanent committee to be tasked with writing the Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel Annual Report, following up with the Partnership Council on CRP related issues, coordinating with in-state and national CRP conference groups, and communicating CRP developments to necessary parties.

Upon creation of such a committee, a request for volunteers and/or nominations of committee members will be made and appointments to the committee may be moved and voted upon.

Legal counsel noted that creating a standing committee would require changing the bylaws. The Council did not want to attempt to change the bylaws without thoroughly publicly noticing such beforehand, so those discussing options decided to create the CRP committee on an Ad-Hoc basis. The committee is tasked with addressing CRP related issues, including discussing the council's functions as a CRP, comparing the functioning of this CRP to other CRPs in the state and across the nation, and reporting back to the Council. The motion was made by Supervisor Johnson and seconded by LaTonya Johnson. The motion was unanimously approved.

Willie Johnson, Mark Mertens, and LaTonya Johnson each volunteered to serve on the CRP Committee. Mark Mertens made the appointments and moved approval on the membership before the council. The Council voted unanimous approval of the motion.

Randall Keys conveyed that the CRP annual report serves two purposes: Statutory for the state – the Council must prepare a report to the department, and meeting Federal regulations.

**7) Setting the Meeting Calendar for 2018, Mark Mertens, Chair**

After discussion about avoiding the Easter Break weeks for various schools, and ensuring that settlement reports can be timely reported, the Partnership Council agreed upon meeting dates for 2018.

- Friday, January 26, 2018
- Friday, April 13, 2018 (*Community Meeting –Settlement Report for July – Dec 2017*)
- Friday, September 28, 2018 (*Community Meeting –Settlement Report for Jan – June 2018*)
- Friday, November 30, 2018

**8) Community Forum, Mark Mertens, Chair**

The Chair offered time for members of the public to bring ideas to the Partnership Council to aid in bettering the child welfare system.

Chris Schaefer announced that the Ed. Liaisons will be offering an education seminar for free at the Sojourner Truth House on October 18th, and it is for professionals to attend and to bring parents.

**9) National CRP Conference**

Mark Mertens, Willie Johnson, Libby Mueller, and Deanna Alexander provided additional information on content from the May 2017 National CRP Conference, including handouts that list the other CRP groups in the nation.

**10) Division Updates, Robin Joseph, Administrator, DMCPs**

- a. Quality Operations Bureau, Mark Ramion, Bureau Director
- b. Quality Improvement Section, Phil Zellmer, Section Chief
- c. Administrative Section, Rick Kastenmeier, Section Chief

Each Director and Chief provided an oral presentation to introduce attendees to their Bureau / Section, explaining how many staff are involved, what types of duties they perform, and how they function collaboratively within the Division.

**11) Concluding Remarks, Mark Mertens, Chair**

The Chair offered an opportunity for any other public comments or announcements and confirmed the next meeting date as January 26, 2018.

*These Meeting Minutes were approved by the Council on January 26, 2018.*