

MILWAUKEE CHILD WELFARE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL
Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services
Friday, March 26, 2021
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, the meeting was conducted by Zoom rather than in-person. The Zoom meeting information was made available on the DCF DMCPs Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council webpage on Friday, March 19, 2021 (<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/mcps/partnership-council>)

Members Present: At the request of Chairperson Michele Bria, a roll call was taken to identify the Partnership Council members present for the meeting.

Present were Ms. Libby Mueller, Judge Laura Crivello, Ms. Carmen Pitre, Ms. Christine Holmes, Mr. Tony Shields, Dr. Mallory O'Brien, Mr. Victor Barnett, Supervisor Sequanna Taylor, Supervisor Willie Johnson Jr., Supervisor Patti Logsdon, Mr. Mark Mertens, Dr. Michele Bria, Senator Alberta Darling, Senator LaTonya Johnson, Mr. Steve Gilbertson

A quorum of the Council was present on the Zoom meeting.

Notice of Meeting – Chairperson Michele Bria reviewed compliance with Open Meetings Law requirements

First, the notice of the meeting was published on the DCF and DOA websites on March 19, 2021, and in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on March 22, 2021.

Second, the notice was faxed to the newspaper of record for the State of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin State Journal, on March 19, 2021.

The notice was emailed to the Partnership Council stakeholders including any media who had requested such notice on March 22, 2021.

Finally, the agenda was posted on the front door of the DMCPD building at 635 N. 26th St. on March 19, 2021.

This satisfies the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law requirements for notice under Wis. Stat. § 19.84(1)(b).

Review and Approval of Past Minutes, Dr. Michele Bria, Chair

A motion was made by Mr. Tony Shields to approve minutes from November 20, 2020 meeting. Mr. Victor Bennett seconded to approve. Motion passed unanimously.

Jeanine B. Settlement Update

Emilie Amundson, Secretary of the Department of Children and Families

Emilie Amundson expressed her excitement to celebrate the progress of the Milwaukee County Child Welfare System. She stated that the recent joint action with Children's Rights to begin resolving the *Jeanine B. Settlement* is 28 years in the making based on the ongoing work to ensure the permanence, safety and well-being of children alleged to be maltreated. Thousands of people have worked together to accomplish this progress such as foster parents, guardians, kinship care providers, DCF and DMCPD staff and management, staff and management of partner agencies and service providers, elected officials, community members and organizations, Attorney Eric Thompson and Children's Rights, and the Partnership Council members. The child welfare system is better in many ways and operations during the pandemic have proven much stronger and resilient than ever before.

DCF will remain committed to transparency and community partnership. The Partnership Council will continue to meet and provide guidance and oversight to DMCPD operations. DCF will continue to report the results of operations to the public and will seek ways to engage with the community to work together to improve the lives of children and families. Transformational work is on the horizon with the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) which will move to keep more children safely at home.

Eric Thompson, Children's Rights

Eric Thompson acknowledged that there is much to be proud of because children in out-of-home care today are safe, regularly seen by staff, and much more likely to return home or be placed in an alternative permanent home. In 1993 when the

Jeanine B. case was initially filed, children were at higher risk of suffering further maltreatment in out-of-home care and ongoing caseloads were unmanageable. The settlement report from 2020 paints a different picture. Some key metrics from the 2020 Settlement are:

- .022 percent of children in out-of-home placements were the subject of substantiated maltreatment in 2020 while in care, well below the expected federal standard.
- The vast majority of children are receiving regular medical and dental care and are spending less than two years in out-of-home care.
- 97% of expected regular face-to-face case worker visits are happening even during the pandemic with virtual and in-person visits.
- Caseloads average 13.4 children per ongoing case worker which is well within professional standards.

Reform that is still needed:

- Too many children, especially under the age of five, are subjected to multiple placements moves. The research shows stability is critical to healthy child development.
- As of December 2020, over 60% of ongoing case workers are beyond the national standard with 15 children on their caseload.
- Case worker turnover is a perennial challenge; 57 workers out of 190 were lost for a turnover rate of 30% in 2020. The good news is that this is the lowest turnover rate in years. There was 50% turnover as recently as 2019.

Children's Rights is proud of the role it has played in Milwaukee over the past three decades and challenges everyone to continue building on this success.

Sarah Henery, DMCPs Administrator

Sarah Henery thanked everyone who dedicated a part of their career to working with children and families. Ms. Henery gave her appreciation to Attorney Thompson and Children's Rights for all their work to improve the child welfare system, the Department of Justice and DCF Attorney Mary Burke for their guidance, the DCF Bureau of Performance Management for putting the settlement performance presentations together with accuracy of numbers and data, and all the Ongoing agency partners.

DMCPs system looks different since the initiation of the *Jeanine B.* Settlement. More than 3,000 fewer children are in foster care in Milwaukee County and there

are lower rates of child maltreatment. DMCPs has been meeting the federal placement stability metric.

Moving forward, DMCPs priorities are sustaining progress, finding new ways to support children in their family homes and family settings, and continuing to prioritize safety and permanence. DMCPs wants families to have fewer touches with the system and to increase the quality of those contacts. DMCPs is also prioritizing having real conversations about the impact of race and systemic racism within practice.

DMCPs will carry a message of hope and positivity about their staff and families. Staff continued to see children and families throughout the pandemic. DMCPs staff reunified many children with their families and in the past summer, overdue Initial Assessment cases went from 350 to 16. DMCPs looks forward to working together with partners to service the Milwaukee community.

Ms. Henery advised that at the next Partnership Council meeting, data collected in relation to the implementation of FFPSA will be presented.

Ongoing Agencies

Dwayne Marks, SaintA

Dwayne Marks yielded time to SaintA President and CEO, Ann Leinfelder Grove, to speak. Ms. Leinfelder Grove expressed her gratitude on behalf of SaintA for the opportunity to serve Milwaukee's children and families and that their strong collaborative relationships created positive change and helped maintain performance gains.

Dwayne Marks stated that SaintA is looking forward to the future with their partners and will lean on the potential of FFPSA legislation to serve children and families. SaintA will build on their commitment of authentic community engagement, the promotion of self-healing communities, honoring diversity, equity and inclusion. SaintA will strive to identify and address lack of equity, disproportionality and systemic practices that are racist. Mr. Marks said that they want to "Build bridges, not barriers."

Susanna Leggio, Children's Wisconsin – Community Services

Susanna Leggio stated that the settlement has been transformative for Children's Wisconsin. Children's Wisconsin intends to carry the accomplishments made through the settlement in partnership with all their colleagues. Children's

Wisconsin has three priority values that will continue to serve as markers for their work. The priority values are:

- Child Safety- commitment to making sure children are safe in parental homes and in out-of-home care.
- Family Connectiveness- Keeping families intact and increasing the number of children placed with relatives.
- Client Voice- Elevating client voice and institutionalizing within their child welfare programs. Children's Wisconsin anticipates having a parent advocate with lived experience to come and help with client voice in April 2021.

Children's Wisconsin is looking forward to their continued evolution as the implementation of FFPSA happens.

Overview Presentation of the *Jeanine B. Settlement Agreement Performance January – December 2020*, Rick Miracola, Bureau of Performance Management

On Rick Miracola's behalf, Tyler Oettinger summarized and highlighted key performance measures made by DMCPs from the start of the settlement agreement reporting made in 2003 through December 2020. The statistics show significant improvements have been made in placement stability, substantiated maltreatment in out-of-home care, face-to-face contacts, initial health screens, annual medical and dental exams, ongoing case manager turnover, and caseloads. The complete performance report is available on the DCF website.

Settlement Exit Update & Questions, Corey Finkelmeyer, Assistant Attorney General, Wisconsin Department of Justice

The joint motion to the Eastern District Federal Court was filed on February 3rd, 2021. Documents about the filed joint motion are available at <https://dcfwisconsin.gov/mcps/settlement>. Judge Pamela Pepper is assigned to this case. The parties are currently waiting to schedule a hearing conference to terminate the consent decree. Notice of consent decree and about further proceedings will be posted in media outlets in English and Spanish. The hearing will be a presentation by both sides and there will be an opportunity for the public to comment and testify at the hearing. No hearing date is set yet.

DCF Budget, Wendy Henderson, Administrator of Division of Safety and Permanence

Presentation materials can be found at:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/mcps/partnership-council>

Ms. Henderson presented the top line items related to the Biennial Budget that Governor Evers released in February 2021. These items have been proposed but the budget needs to go to the Joint Finance Committee and the final budget will be signed sometime in summer 2021. The budget request includes proposed child welfare investments across the entire community such as: high quality child care, new in-home service support, support for relative caregivers and foster care providers, improved congregate care settings, support to maintain sibling connections, training for providers and child welfare workers.

Sarah Henery spoke about the challenges the State of Wisconsin has with high-level residential treatment for children who have especially tough behavioral health issues. In the last two years, there has been 24 episodes of children being sent to out-of-state treatment, about two-thirds went to Youth Villages in Tennessee. Part of the proposed budget would be allocated to trying to replicate the services offered in Tennessee with an in-state facility.

Budget proposals related to the Youth Justice System include: returning 17 year old children to the youth justice system, foundational training for Youth Justice workers, case management practices, out-of-home care services especially for youth whom may have issues in congregate care settings, independent living programming, driver's education, and higher education support.

Council Member Questions about Biennial Budget:

Senator LaTonya Johnson: Why is it hard to replicate the services provided at the Youth Villages in Tennessee here? What types of programming are they offering there that we cannot replicate here? What is the cost per child receive treatment out of state? How many Juvenile Justice youth have been sent out of state?

Sarah Henery responded that the cost is neutral in comparison to an in-state Residential Care Center (RCC) for children and youth. Other than transport, there is not much of an additional cost in terms of care. Youth Villages is a psychiatric residential treatment facility which is a hybrid of a RCC and mental health center. Ms. Henery stated that the care that Youth Villages provides is believed to be replicable in Wisconsin. However, Wisconsin does not have the option to have this hybrid in one center because youth mental health treatment is a part of the Department of Health Services. The future model may be a partnership between mental health service providers and RCCs to be able to offer this care in Wisconsin. Wendy Henderson added that there may be blending of county and state funds in the future to service children with more intensive needs.

Judge Crivello provided an example of success when a child was placed at Youth Villages for a year and now is thriving. She received an analysis from a mental health professional who stated the child needed time away from all the factors happening here and he was able to stabilize in a new environment. Judge Crivello stated in the few circumstances that it has been warranted to place Juvenile Justice youth out of state for treatment, there have been positive results. Ms. Henderson stated that we do not have the numbers of Juvenile Justice youth placed out of state, but Milwaukee County Health and Human Services would likely have this information.

Supervisor Sequanna Taylor: What is the transportation cost to place children out-of-state? Are we keeping track of the data and information from those children who come back from Youth Villages and how this treatment affected them?

Sarah Henery answered that the travel costs are typically low because children are usually driven to their out-of-home placements. A significant data project around keeping a statistical analysis has not been developed yet because of the small number of children placed out of state but stories have been shared anecdotally.

Bridget Chybowski advised that prior to an out-of-state placement, the assigned ongoing agency and DMCPs meet to staff the case and discuss what services are needed to meet the needs of the child. A staffing to form a transitional plan also occurs before a child returns home. There have been some bumps when children have returned but this is monitored, and efforts are made to make their transitions as successful as possible.

Senator Alberta Darling- What are the stats on how many foster kids end up in the Juvenile Justice system? What are we going to do in terms of resources and policy to help education and foster care systems?

Sarah Henery gave credit to the Ongoing partners that put supports in place to help children go to school throughout the pandemic like working to get families access to technology. Dwayne Marks advised that Saint A received technology donations from Oprah Winfrey's philanthropic foundation for Milwaukee's children. SaintA also gave families food gift cards and is establishing a partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools to find other ways to support.

Susanna stated that Children's Wisconsin caregivers and Marquette University student volunteers partnered to start an education navigation program to provide

virtual educational support.

Judge Crivello stated that the Running Rebels provided computers to youth involved with Juvenile Justice, their staff make daily phone calls to youth and they provide academic support at their facilities and at children's homes. Division of Youth and Family Services is providing mentors to children and Kids Matter CASA volunteers are providing academic support also.

Wendy Henderson will be contacting their data team for the specific numbers of foster children in Juvenile Justice system.

MCWPC Subcommittees Updates

Health and Education: Ms. Christine Holmes- Have not met yet since last Partnership meeting but their previous meeting produced information about how the committee will move forward with trying to implement Families First with health and education throughout COVID. They are working to find ways to eliminate systemic barriers to provide the health kids need.

Out-of-Home Care: Judge Laura Crivello- There have been two committee meetings where 22-25 community members have joined. Committee is focusing on targeting youth age 13 years or older who have had multiple out-of-home placements. Aim is to find a way to decrease the placement changes and to find permanency for these youth. Scheduled next to meet May 6th at 12:15pm to have presentations from stakeholders and look at data that presently exists to inform how the committee can improve our system.

Critical Incident: Ms. Libby Mueller- Met twice since last Partnership Council. Meetings focused on educating members on new critical incident review process. The committee is waiting for data compiled from DCF related to the critical incident outcomes and findings to see what recommendations can be made to support workers and individuals who are making decisions.

Community Input, Dr. Michele Bria, Chair

There were no questions or comments made from the public.

Concluding Remarks, Dr. Michele Bria, Chair

Dr. Bria acknowledged that this has been a historic meeting; 28 years in the making and thanked everyone for caring for all our kids and giving them the best

opportunity to thrive. She acknowledged the council members, Sarah Henery and DMCPs frontline workers, and Attorney Eric Thompson.

Supervisor Willie Johnson Jr. also congratulated everyone who contributed positivity to the child welfare system from the stakeholders, staff, management, community volunteers, foster parents, parents who worked to be reunited with their children and Attorney Thompson.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion to adjourn made by Supervisor Willie Johnson Jr. and seconded by Ms. Christine Holmes. Motion passed unanimously.

