

## CONTACT INFO

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# Child Welfare: More Trouble for Troubled Kids

## Recommendations:

- Restore the request by the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) to increase reimbursement rates to foster parents by one percent in 2002 and two percent in 2003.
- At a minimum, restore DHFS funding request for Milwaukee Child Welfare Service funds. Consider additional funding.
- Restore funding request of DHFS for Milwaukee child welfare vendor (Case Management Contract and Mentor Services) funds for caseload reduction.

## Reimbursement Rates to Foster Parents:

## Background:

The proposal would increase rates by 1 percent in year one of the biennium and 2 percent in the second year, which is not in the Governor's budget.

Foster care rates in Milwaukee range from \$302 per month for children under five to \$391 for children ages 15 and over. Special rates are available for children with exceptional needs. On December 31, 1999, there were approximately 9,800 children in out-of-home placement in Wisconsin. Eighty-five percent of these children were under a CHIPS petition (Child in Need of Protection and Services) or voluntarily placed. The remainder were the result of a JIPS (Juvenile in Need of Protection and Services) or juvenile delinquency petition.

## Reimbursement Rates to Foster Parents:

## Rationale:

The need for foster parents has become increasingly desperate in the past few years. As more parents work, there are fewer people who can take on the additional responsibility of being a foster parent. In addition, Wisconsin's reimbursement rates for foster parents remain the lowest in the Midwest region. Recent reports of abuse in Milwaukee foster homes emphasize the need to support and retain trained and loving foster care parents.

Research has shown that it is important for children who have been abused or neglected to have a consistent caregiver. High turnover rates compromise the ability of counties to provide consistent care. Retention of foster parents is difficult and lack of adequate reimbursement has been noted as one reason foster parents are not able to continue their service. Some counties have utilized already stressed county budgets to supplement the state foster care reimbursement rates in order to retain foster parents.

## Foster Care Rate Increase Request

	Department Request 2002	Department Request 2003	Governor's Recommendation
GPR	\$119,200	\$530,700	\$0
Fed	\$77,900	\$345,700	\$0

### Child Welfare Service Funding:

### Background:

In its budget request DHFS recommended a decrease of approximately \$5.4 million in service funds for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW); this decrease reflected current caseload realities. While that recommendation raised concern, more alarming is Governor McCallum's recommended cut of an additional \$1.14 million.

The Safety Service program was severely affected. Governor McCallum recommended a \$1.1 million reduction in that program alone. This comes at a time when Safety Service utilization by BMCW is increasing.

### Child Welfare Service Funding:

### Rationale:

According to Bureau reports, twice as many children are remaining in their homes through Safety Services than are being placed in out-of-home care. Decreased funding for that program is counterproductive to establishing permanence for children.

### BMCW Service Funding Recommendations

	DHFS Request	Governor's Recommendation
GPR	(\$5.11 Million) decrease	(\$6.24 Million) decrease
Fed	(\$325,134) decrease	(\$335,800) decrease

### Caseload Reduction:

DHFS recommended that vendor agencies be provided additional funds, so that they could reduce the caseloads of child welfare workers to 14 cases per worker. The funding would allow the agencies to assume that five percent of their worker slots would be vacant; this reflects reasonable variations in staffing. Governor McCallum decreased the funding to reflect a caseload of 15 cases per worker and assumed a zero percent staff vacancy rate. In a report issued by WCCF, "From the Front Lines: Milwaukee's Child Welfare Community Speaks Out," one difficulty noted by caseworkers was that the amount of documentation required for each case prevented them from spending adequate amounts of time with the family; they could not provide comprehensive casework services.

Caseloads of 14 families per worker would help caseworkers as they try to spend more time with families and thereby improve services to children and families. Further, assuming a zero percent staff vacancy rate is completely unrealistic; since the inception of BMCW, there has never been a month when vendors had a zero percent vacancy rate. Allowing creeping caseloads can quickly erode program effectiveness.

### BMCW Case Management Funding Recommendations

	DHFS Request	Governor's Recommendation
GPR	\$12.02 Million	\$10.82 Million
Fed	\$3.42 Million	\$3.07 Million

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