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Date: May 27, 2011
To: Joint Finance Committee
From: Ken Taylor, Executive Director, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
Re: Budget Paper #270: Statutory Daily Rates, Juvenile Appropriation Deficit, and SJO Funding
Paper #272: Youth Aids Funding

We urge the Joint Finance Committee to avoid reductions in Youth Aids funds that can be used at the county level to support proven, community-based approaches that prevent juvenile crime and effectively provide safety for the community. The Governor's budget proposes two changes that effectively shift additional costs to the counties. We support other alternative as indicate below.

Statutory Daily Rates, Juvenile Appropriation Deficit, and SJO Funding (#270): We support Alternative 3a which modifies the Daily Rate Deficit Charge, specifically recommending a reduction in that charge to \$5 (vs. \$17).

Discussion: While we recognize the inherent challenges in accurately projecting the juvenile correctional institution populations and in effectively downsizing facilities while ensuring the quality of services provided, it is not reasonable to propose that the entire cost of erasing the deficits incurred be borne by counties paying more for services they did not receive or would not receive in the future, even if spread over a ten-year period.

Adding \$17 per day to the cost of a JCI placement effectively removes \$17 per day from the counties, most of whom have been making the necessary reductions in their own services and budgets in order to meet their own budget requirements. Reducing this Daily Rate Deficit Charge to \$5/day is a reasonable compromise that recognizes the difficulty the Division of Juvenile Corrections faced with the rapid declines in their institutional populations while at the same time recognizing that the fiscal consequences of the decisions made should not be passed on to the counties. This option will require that the Department make necessary reductions in projected costs associated with the operation of the juvenile correctional institutions to close the \$12/day gap remaining.

Youth Aids Funding (#272): We support Alternative 4, which would effectively maintain current Youth Aids funding levels.

Discussion: The original intent of the Youth Aids funding mechanism was to provide incentives (as well as responsibility) to local county governments to manage their delinquency services in as cost-effective manner as possible, and to promote the development of community-based alternatives that can successfully engage and re-direct at-risk and delinquent youth in becoming positive, pro-social members of our communities.

Since 1996, when the direct link between increases in the daily rates for juvenile correctional services and Youth Aids funding grants was broken, the rate of increase in daily rates for services has far outpaced the growth in state funding provided to counties through Youth Aids. This has continued to be the case well after establishing that 17-year-olds would be under the jurisdiction of the adult court.

These disproportionate increases in daily rates have placed greater fiscal pressures on counties. This has had some positive side effects because it led to an increase in creative and successful efforts at the local level, as evidenced by substantially reduced juvenile arrests, court petitions, and correctional placements. However, reducing Youth Aids funding at this point poses a serious risk to that progress.