

May 18, 2011

To: Senator Alberta Darling and Representative Robin Vos  
Co-Chairs of Joint Finance Committee  
Joint Committee on Finance Members

From: The Save BadgerCare Coalition  
The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations  
Thomas G. Cannon, Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee  
Sara Finger, Executive Director, Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health  
John Hendrick, Governmental Affairs Director, Coalition of WI Aging Groups  
Teresa Huyck, President and CEO, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin  
Robert Kraig, Executive Director, Citizen Action of Wisconsin  
Ann Laatsch, Managing Attorney – Disability Services, Community Advocates, Inc.  
Tammy Liddicoat, Executive Director, Employment Resources, Inc.  
Hal Menendez, Staff Attorney, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc.  
Mary Neubauer and Marilyn Walczak, Co-Chairs, Milwaukee Mental Health Taskforce  
Lon Newman, Executive Director, Family Planning Health Services, Inc.  
President, WI Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association  
President, WI Reproductive Health Network  
Lisa Pugh, Public Policy Coordinator, Disability Rights Wisconsin  
Ken Taylor, Executive Director, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

Subject: Centralization of Income Maintenance Programs

As advocates for low income and elderly individuals and families and people with disabilities across the state, we believe there are major considerations and consequences related to the Governor's proposal to centralize and privatize the administration of Wisconsin's Medicaid and BadgerCare programs and to transfer administration of the Food Share, SSI state supplemental benefit and SSI Caretaker benefit programs from the Department of Health Services to the Department of Children and Families. Specifically, the Governor's budget as proposed seeks to centralize administration of programs; end Wisconsin's long standing tradition of local service at the county level; eliminate 270 existing county-based Income Maintenance positions; and to split administration of programs that are now efficiently administered by a single agency. These proposed changes are problematic for many reasons.

Each and every day we serve as a resource for Wisconsin residents who need access to our state's vital public assistance programs including Medicaid, BadgerCare and Food Share. We believe that the changes proposed in the budget bill will unnecessarily complicate the administration of these programs and will make it more difficult for individuals and families to receive the assistance they need. Specifically, the proposed changes will result in an unnecessary duplication of effort and loss of efficiency, a critical loss of face-to-face contact for clients, a potentially burdensome and confusing transfer of programming, and loss of trained staff. Given these likely outcomes, we ask the committee to endorse an alternative to the Governor's proposal that will address these concerns and include the recommendations set forth below.

Our experience tells us that there are several factors that are critical to effective service delivery to Wisconsin's most vulnerable citizens. They include:

- a face to face presence in every county that is accessible during regular office hours to all customers, and includes extra help for people with disabilities, the elderly, persons with limited English proficiency, and persons with other limitations (customers would also have options to access services online or by phone, as appropriate);
- administration of all programs in a unified manner by one state agency with local service delivery;
- cases assigned to individual workers that are responsible for proper handling and processing of benefits;
- a formal process for advocates and community partners to contact agencies directly for assistance and troubleshooting; and
- an advisory committee that includes appropriate advocates and partners, and is written into state statute.

We believe that innovative options to streamline service delivery and reduce costs to the state can be designed and implemented without compromising the quality, efficiency and local service delivery that are characteristic of our current system. The Wisconsin County Human Services Association (WCHSA) and the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) have designed an alternative to the Governor's proposal that both streamlines service and saves precious state resources while maintaining local administration and access. The proposal also seeks to address the significant problems that now exist at the state run centralized Enrollment Services Center and that will be exacerbated by the budget proposal including:

- the failure to process applications within the state time limits, extended phone wait times, and untrained staff;
- the inability to access services in a face to face manner;
- the loss of coordination with other local services; and
- the potential violation of federal law due of privatization.

The proposal brought forth by WCHSA and WCA is a design that will better serve Wisconsin's residents and avoid the significant failures that are likely to result from the proposed centralization. We also understand that at an estimated cost of \$115 million per year, the WCHSA/WCA alternate proposal saves \$42 million a year, based on CY 2010 costs. In contrast, the full cost of the Governor's proposal is unclear as it does not detail how the Food Share and other programs that are to be transferred to the Department of Children and Families will be administered.

We encourage you to consider this proposal as an alternative to the centralization and transfer of programming proposed in the 2011-2013 budget bill. We also thank WCHSA and WCA for their diligent work on this alternate proposal and for bringing us to the table to discuss it.