

Recommendations to the Children’s Council from the subcommittee on the Family Support Program Policy on “First Come First Serve”

November 8, 2007

Subcommittee members: Sue Gilbertson, Liz Hecht, Barb Katz, Keith Keller, John Shaw, Michelle Sturz, Julie Turkoske, Deb Willink.

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Purpose:

The purpose of the subcommittee was to develop recommendations to the DHFS regarding the FSP legislation concerning a statewide shift in policy from a purely first come first serve to establishing criteria for priority of services that take into account urgency of need, statewide consistency, developmental impact on eligible children, and other factors, so as to ensure that available funds are used consistently and effectively.

Background:

Family Support is a partnership between policy-makers, counties and families who have children with significant disabilities who have chosen to keep their children at home rather than placing them in an institution, resulting in a great savings for the state and taxpayers. This partnership is strengthened by the belief that there is a safety net when families need help, particularly when the need for help is urgent. It is difficult to provide this safety net when counties do not know what individual families need. Planning to meet family and child needs occurs when the family and their service coordinator work in partnership to identify and prioritize the outcomes the family is working toward and then match the services that best help the family move toward those outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. The current Wisconsin Family Support Program (FSP) statute states that counties “may”, but does not require counties to, develop policies to address crisis situations. We recommend that “may” be changed to “must”, such that all counties work with their advisory committees to develop policies that allow them to address crisis situations and urgent needs. Examples of crisis or urgent need include: health and safety concerns; need for building modifications; and adaptive or assistive technology.
2. Current policy on annual assessment of needs is optional based on availability of funding. We recommend that an assessment of needs be done annually with families currently served by the FSP and funding to each family be based on priority needs as identified through a discussion about the outcomes the family prioritizes.
3. Many counties have little or no information on the needs of families on the FSP waiting list, making it difficult to determine crisis or urgency of need. We recommend that counties complete some type of an annual assessment of the

- needs of families on the waiting list. This could be accomplished, with consideration given to information gathering strategies accessible to all families, by: a review of the risk section of the functional screen with families; distribution of a written or verbal survey; or use of an assessment tool. We suggest a tool be developed and disseminated to counties to assist them to meet this expectation.
4. Families in crisis or with urgent needs often do not know where to turn for help. We recommend that FSP staff communicate with families annually and inform them of the availability of crisis funds and the process to request these funds.
 5. Families and children miss critical developmental opportunities when on a waiting list. Counties should take into consideration the developmental needs of a child that may be time sensitive. Examples include the need for a stander (when not covered by insurance) to promote hip and bone development, an augmentative communication device for a child learning to speak, or the need for a ramp for a child getting too large to carry into the home.
 6. We recommend that every effort be made to develop statewide consistency that reflects policies to address crisis and urgent needs and a process to assess this. This does not mean that every county must have the same policy.
 7. County Family Support Advisory Committees have a statutory responsibility to develop and review county FSP policies, but often the advisory committees either do not understand their role, or do not have the information they need to provide a meaningful review of policies. We recommend that information and support be provided to county staff and county advisory committees on their role in developing policy, guidance for counties on what constitutes crisis situations, and technical assistance on a process for review of program policies. State annual plan reviews will pay particular attention to the process used to develop policies and the rigor of these policies.