

Wisconsin Council on Children's Long-Term Support

March 10, 2008

Kevin Hayden, Department of Health and Family Services
Reggie Bicha, Department of Health and Family Services
1 W. Wilson St.
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Secretary Hayden and Secretary-Designee Reggie Bicha,

The Council on Children's Long Term Supports views the formation of the new Department on Children and Families as both an opportunity and a challenge in meeting the complex needs of Wisconsin's children with disabilities and special health care needs. The creation of the new Department presents an opportunity to improve the coordination of services for all children, including those with disabilities. Although programs for children with disabilities remain, for the most part, in the Department of Health, many children with disabilities and their families interact with multiple programs such as child protection which will now be located in the new department. Therefore, it will be critical to develop a strong infrastructure to facilitate coordination between the two departments with a goal of supporting children with disabilities and their families in the most seamless way possible. Families need to work with other State Departments as well; for example, the Department of Public Instruction or the Department of Corrections. Each of these departments has their own missions plus separate philosophies, goals, and ways of meeting their goals which can differ from other state agencies that aid children and families. With the formation of the new department meaningful coordination will become more challenging without a planned and focused approach. Therefore, the Council believes that a thoughtful process must be developed to address the needs of children with disabilities and their families who benefit from services and must interact across departments.

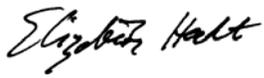
While locating programs for children with disabilities across multiple departments presents many challenges, the Council supports the current organization that locates children with disabilities in the Division of Long Term Care. We believe this decision promotes continued coordination between Medicaid, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, Family Care and other essential long-term supports. It also maintains the expertise of staff supporting programs for children with disabilities. This said, we also believe it is critical that the following issues be considered to insure the coordination of new and existing policies and initiatives across departments and their relevance and impact on children with disabilities and their families:

- Develop a purposeful and ongoing infrastructure that creates and maintains linkages between all departments, ensuring coordination of initiatives, inclusion of children with disabilities as appropriate, and an assessment of impact on children with disabilities
- Provide Secretary level leadership that facilitates coordination of programs and initiatives that support coordinated rules and policies
- Ensure that budget and system change initiatives for children with disabilities and family supports are not lost within the current Division of Long Term Care focus on adults and elders and that the new Department has expertise in the needs of children with disabilities and their families
- Ensure a coordinated budget process around cross cutting budget issues

- Encourage counties to develop local structures for Children's Service Sections that coordinate long-term supports, early intervention and prevention, juvenile justice, child protection and mental health services
- Provide a linkage between the parent advisory structure in the new department and the Council on Children's Long Term Supports

We would like an opportunity for members and representatives of the Children's Council to meet with members of the transition team to discuss these issues. We look forward to working with you and welcome the opportunity to explore these recommendations together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Hecht". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the left of a vertical red line.

Elizabeth Hecht
Chair, Council on Children's Long Term Support

Cc:

Council members
Beth Wroblewski
Sinikka Santala
Karen Timberlake