



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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June 4, 2007

TO: Joint Finance Committee
FR: Charity Eleson, Executive Director
RE: Budget Paper # 124: Civil Legal Services for the Indigent
(DOA – OJA)

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) supports Civil Legal Services for the Indigent and recommends adoption of **Alternative 1 and Alternative 5** of paper 124: Civil Legal Services for the Indigent (DOA – OJA).

The legislature should increase funds for civil legal services in response to the gap between the type and volume of services available, in comparison with the needs. In the *Bridging the Gap* report released earlier this year, the State Bar of Wisconsin found that 500,000 low-income Wisconsin residents face a legal need without the help of a lawyer each year. In that report, it is estimated that some legal aid organizations are able to help only **one in five** low-income families who qualify for their help. That leaves 80 percent of low-income families who have legal needs to fight their battles on their own, usually with an attorney on the other side.

The greatest legal need of low-income Wisconsin residents is assistance in obtaining public benefits. Civil legal services help poor families access the resources they need for basic living necessities, such as food, clothing and shelter. Families who do not have access to benefits may have greater trouble providing a safe and nurturing environment for their kids. Access to civil legal services also provides protection for domestic abuse and child abuse victims, prevents homelessness, and helps families craft child support plans. The critical legal services funded through this appropriation will help Wisconsin families access the benefits they need and dramatically increase the likelihood of success for every child in Wisconsin.