



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children  
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

555 West Washington Ave, Suite 200

Madison, WI 53703

[www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org)

☎ 608-284-0580

✉ 608-284-0583

May 7, 2007

TO: Joint Finance Committee

FR: Charity Eleson, Executive Director

RE: Budget Paper #200 – Create Department of Children and Families

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) supports the Governor's creation of the new Department of Children and Families (DCF). The creation of one state agency creates an opportunity for the state to integrate programs for children and families across systems in order to improve outcomes for both children and their parents.

However, it is important that Wisconsin use this opportunity to ensure that programs for children and their families are as comprehensively included in the new department as possible. To that end, we are recommending an immediate modification to include juvenile justice programs and a directive to the new department to work to plan the integration of early childhood programs.

- 1. WCCF strongly urges moving the Division of Juvenile Corrections from the Department of Corrections to DCF. The Division of Juvenile Corrections provides services to children who are sentenced through the juvenile court. Those children often are involved in the child welfare system and receive similar services to children who are involved in the court system through abuse and neglect cases. WCCF believes that continuity of services will improve by including the Division of Juvenile Corrections in the new DCF. These services include administrative, programmatic and institutional supports for juvenile offenders.**

Children in the juvenile justice system could be served in a more effective and efficient manner if the services were not split between two departments.

One of the main functions of the current Division of Juvenile Corrections is to run the juvenile correctional facilities (Ethan Allen School, Lincoln Hills School and Southern Oaks Girls School). Placement in these facilities is our last opportunity to provide intensive rehabilitative services to juveniles. Because the nature of services needed by these juveniles is more akin to human services (treatment, therapy and school) than correctional services, it would be a logical fit to house the Division in the new Department. Further, county departments of human services or social services currently deliver services to both child welfare populations and juvenile justice populations. Including state administered juvenile justice programming in the same department as child welfare programming, then, could facilitate improvements in state and county collaboration in the administration of service delivery to these children.

Additionally, as we learn more about the intersection between adolescent brain development and effective treatment of juvenile offenders, it will be important to have the administrative mission and flexibility to provide developmentally appropriate treatment for kids in the system. By moving the Division of Juvenile Corrections to the new department, we can remove any administrative barriers from continuous services between the community and the institutions and ensure that the treatment provided is focused on healthy childhood development.

- 2. WCCF believes that outcomes for young children could be improved by ensuring that all early childhood programs—from early education and care to programs for children with special needs to nutritional programs—are integrated. To that end, we are recommending that the new department be directed to plan for the integration of early childhood programs and come back with a full recommendation to the Legislature in the 2009-2011 legislative session.**

Given what we know about the importance of what happens to a child in his or her earliest years and the effect that early learning and care experiences have on a child's developing brain, Wisconsin should take this opportunity to ensure that its public programs are working in concert to ensure the best possible outcomes for young children.

WCCF looks forward to working with you on creating this new department. Please contact me if you have any questions at 284-0580, ext. 302.

Thank you.