

-COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE-
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

REVISED
1/19/11

DATE : January 6, 2011

TO : Supervisor Michael Mayo, Interim Chairman, Board of Supervisors

FROM : John Ruggini, Assistant Fiscal & Budget Administrator, DAS-Fiscal

SUBJECT : Request to create 4.0 FTE Disability Benefits Specialist (PR 13) in the Disabilities Services Division (DSD) of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

REQUEST

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is requesting to create 4.0 FTE Disability Benefits Specialist (PR 13) effective February 21, 2011.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

The Disabilities Services Division began operation of the Disabilities Resource Center (DRC) in 2010. The primary role of the resource center is to provide information and assistance, service access and prevention, disability benefits counseling, and access to publicly funded long-term care. In addition, the state requires that the DRC offer the Disability Benefits Specialist (DBS) Program as one of its primary functions.

The DBS program helps provide access to Milwaukee County Residents who want to apply for private or publicly funded benefits such as Family Care, Family Care Partnership, Supplementary Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Medicaid or other benefits for which they are eligible. If a client is denied benefits, the Disability Benefits Specialist also helps with determining the reason for denial and resolving the issue if possible. The program also has attorney services that are provided through a contract with the State Department of Health Service (DHS) and Disability Rights Wisconsin.

Currently, this function is performed through a contract with Independence First. At the start of the program, the State recommended that the department perform this function with internal staff. During the planning process for the DRC implementation, the department decided it would be best to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for this function to ensure that clients received quality services. After the first year of this operation, DSD was able to reexamine the program and its needs. It was determined that operating the program utilizing County staff would be a better option due to program oversight concerns, closer working relationships with economic support staff, continuity of communication and team building with other DRC staff and functions as well as the interface issues with the program attorney backup agency. As a result, the department is requesting the creation of 4.0 FTE Disability Benefits Specialist, which would report to the Disabilities Resource Center Manager. By operating this program with internal staff, Milwaukee County would also be consistent with other Aging and Disability Resource Centers in the State of Wisconsin.

The Disabilities Benefits Specialist will be responsible for assisting clients in accessing public or private benefits. These responsibilities include: providing information about

private or public government benefits; providing technical assistance on how to access benefits and information regarding the responsibilities of the program participants; assist applicants with gathering the appropriate verifying data, both financial and non-financial; provide advice and assistance in preparing and filing complaints, grievances, and appeals at the local and state levels, and beyond; provide representation as appropriate for individuals with developmental and physical disabilities, substance use disorders or mental health issues as needed in administrative hearings or other grievance steps; consult with DBF program attorneys for consideration in representation in administrative and judicial proceedings; identify and document concerns of clients being served that have disabilities; ensure that quality services are provided to clients; and offer choices of what community services and resources will be provided, who will provide these services and how they will be provided. By operating this program with internal staff, Milwaukee County would also be consistent with other Aging and Disability Resource Centers in the State of Wisconsin.

Given the annual cost of these positions at the top of the pay range (\$261,181) and the cost of the annual contract (\$373,750), it is fiscally prudent to bring this function in-house even when accounting for annual benefit cost increases of County Positions.


RECOMMENDATION

To allow for more program oversight and the continuity of communication with other DRC staff and outside attorneys, the Department of Administrative Services, Fiscal Affairs recommends that the request to create 4.0 FTE Disability Benefits Specialist, effective February 21, 2010, be approved.

FISCAL NOTE

Approval of the request to create 4.0 FTE Disability Benefits Specialist, effective February 21, 2010, will result in no fiscal impact to the County, as the costs of these positions will be paid for with the remaining funds of the contract.

Prepared by:
Antionette Thomas-Bailey
278-4250



John Ruggini
Assistant Fiscal and Budget Administrator

pc: Lee Holloway, Interim County Executive
Candace Richards, Interim-Director of Human Resources
Terrence Cooley, Chief of Staff, County Board
Jennifer Collins, County Board Fiscal and Budget Analyst
Rick Ceschin, County Board Fiscal and Budget Analyst
Geri Lyday, Interim Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Renee Booker, Interim Director, Department of Administrative Services