

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: June 10, 2019

To: Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman – Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Mary Jo Meyers, Director, Department of Health and Human Services

Subject: **An informational report from the Director, Department of Health and Human Services, regarding administration of the Birth to 3 Program**

Background

In May, the County Board requested an update by the Disabilities Services Division (DSD) on the delivery of services for the Birth to 3 Program. The Birth to 3 Program, authorized under Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), supports children with developmental delays or disabilities under the age of three and their families.

The program is a federal entitlement which utilizes state, federal, and local funds, including tax levy, to enhance the development of children with developmental disabilities, minimize the need for special education, and decrease rates of institutionalization. Despite an increased number of referrals to the program, State funding has remained stagnant for the last several years.

Discussion

Prior to 2019, the program was operated in partnership with eight provider agencies: Hear Wisconsin, Curative Care Network, Easter Seals, Lutheran Social Services, Milwaukee Center for Independence, Penfield Children’s Center, St. Francis Children’s Center and Vision Forward. Last summer, DHHS decided to reassess the structure of the Birth to 3 Program given the ongoing pressure of delivering quality services under an entitlement program coupled with flat revenue streams. The initial planning for this new structure was outlined in an informational report to the County Board (File No. 18-502) in July of 2018.

As part of this effort, DSD worked in collaboration with the Combined Community Services Board (CCSB) to sponsor two listening sessions in July of 2018 to gather input from providers and families as well as inform a Request for Proposals (RFP) that was released in August 2018. DHHS held 90-minute listening sessions – one at Kosciusko Community Center on July 17 and the other at Washington Park Senior Center on July 18. Everyone in attendance participated in an open conversation about the experience with Birth to 3 services and general needs for information, support and service for a child and parent living with complex needs. DHHS staff offered responses to specific needs. Parents were invited to share what works well for them and what causes them to cancel or dislike services.

One of the themes that surfaced through the listening sessions was the importance of increasing communication with parents about the Primary Coach Approach to Teaming (PCATT). This concept involves the modeling of therapeutic activities for parents to use with their child during their daily routines, maximizing a parent's ability to support their child's development many times throughout the day. This approach was implemented statewide and has now been incorporated into Milwaukee County's Birth to 3 Program. This approach was outlined in the RFP and requires agencies to establish a team from a variety of disciplines to support a family and the specific needs of their child.

2019 Birth to 3 Contracts

In August of 2018, the RFP was released and a total of five agencies submitted proposals. Four agencies were recommended and approved for contracts to serve an average of 1,484 children per month. Even though the number of providers decreased, DSD maintained level funding at \$4.5 million. The advantages of contracting with fewer agencies include:

- Better ability to monitor & reward quality
- Reduced administrative overhead
- Economies of scale and lower incremental cost to serve each additional child
- Less duplication of effort and services
- Ultimately, the ability to serve more children

The following contracts were approved by the County Board (File No. 18-876) in December 2018.

Provider	2019 Allocation
Curative Care Network	\$2,079,218
Milwaukee Center for Independence	\$517,241
Penfield Children's Center	\$1,382,394
St. Francis Children's Center	\$546,253
Total	\$4,525,106

Hearing & Vision Services Audit

Early in 2019, Hear Wisconsin and Vision Forward raised concerns about service access for children with potential hearing and vision issues. These agencies previously provided hearing and vision services to the Birth to 3 Program but elected not to submit a response to the RFP. Although separate contracts were not established with these agencies for 2019, hearing and vision services are still available to children as required by the contracts with the four provider

agencies. Specifically, the RFP required agencies to describe how hearing and vision screens would be utilized to identify the need for a hearing or vision team member to be added. All four agencies also submitted proposals detailing plans to ensure the appropriate team member was part of the PCATT team if a child had a vision and hearing need/concern/diagnosis.

DHHS fully agrees that early intervention and access to screening to detect potential hearing and vision loss in children is critical. Given the concerns raised by Hear Wisconsin and Vision Forward, DHHS launched an audit in June to examine access to hearing and vision services for children among the four agency providers. This audit is anticipated to be completed at the end of July or early August. DHHS will then present its findings in a report to the board in September.

DSD is now under the leadership of Shakita LaGrant, Assistant Administrator for DSD. She has been working with the Birth to 3 Program staff and providers to implement the changes as part of the 2018 RFP. Please contact Ms. LaGrant or myself if you have any questions or concerns.

Recommendation

This report is informational and no action is required.



Mary Jo Meyers, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

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