

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

**DATE:** July 17, 2020

**TO:** Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Shakita LaGrant, Interim Director, Department of Health and Human Services & Department on Aging

**SUBJECT:** **Request to create 1.0 FTE Project Manager (pay grade 33M-NR) in the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Youth and Family Services**

**Background**

By January of 2015, a history of abuses within Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools resulted in a criminal and civil rights case brought forth by the US Department of Justice, and subsequent civil and class action suits by the ACLU and the Juvenile Law Center in 2017. These concerns highlight and confirm the dangers and failures of youth correctional facilities outlined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, among others.

Milwaukee County had already begun implementing programs and policies to reduce the number of youth in correctional settings that resulted in a 50 percent statewide reduction from 2005 to 2014. Subsequent efforts since 2016 have resulted in a 66 percent reduction in the average daily population (ADP) of Milwaukee County youth at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools. In addition to its participation as a JDAI site, Milwaukee County's Division of Youth and Family Services began a close association with the Columbia University Justice Lab beginning in 2018. As a result, the Division Administrator is a member of Youth Correctional Leaders for Justice and a signatory to its Statement on Ending Youth Prisons. As of this writing, there are 26 county-committed youth from Milwaukee County in the two state-run facilities, and an additional four at the Mendota Juvenile Treatment Facility.

In March of 2018, Wisconsin Act 185 was signed into law. The Act outlines the path for closure of Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools by July 1, 2021 and authorizes the allocation of funds for counties to establish Secure Residential Care Centers for Children and Youth (SRCCCYs) to be operated locally by counties. Milwaukee County recognized serious limitations in purpose and scope inherent in Act 185 that, if implemented, would shift the state's resources of the youth justice system toward "bricks and mortar" and away from effective, community-based practices aimed at reducing incarceration and supporting positive growth and supportive relationships. In a letter submitted and read to the state Act 185 Grant Committee on May 6, 2019, Milwaukee

County advised that “...the current parameters of Act 185 and DOC 347 predispose all SRCCCY proposals toward costly new construction or renovation of detention facilities, without adequately examining the risks and needs of our confined youth or best practices locally and from other jurisdictions to minimize unnecessary confinement and rehabilitate youth in the community. This creates a situation where policy and fiscal realities are at odds with each other and provides the committee with the impossible task of knitting together a statewide system that will be heavily focused on inadequately funded and unsustainable institutional care that will fail to rehabilitate Wisconsin’s youth or advance public safety.”

In keeping with these concerns and in alignment with the County Executive’s proclamation that racism is a public health crisis and its ordinance committing the county to pursue racial equity, the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) has established a goal of attaining a zero ADP in Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools by July 1, 2021. In order to do so, it will be necessary to manage our youth in need of secure care within the local capacity of our MCAP program, which has 24 beds for boys currently and will expand to 32 beds in 2021, as outlined in our Act 185 grant proposal.

**Problem/Opportunity Statement:**

Milwaukee County DYFS must address a number of adaptive challenges as it prepares to implement Wisconsin Act 185 by 2021. While the division has made substantial progress in reducing commitments of youth to the Department of Corrections (DOC) for placement at Lincoln Hills School (LHS), it will be necessary to achieve and sustain an approximately 60 percent greater reduction in the future. Currently, the combined population of youth in the MCAP program and the standard (non-Serious Juvenile Offenders) commitments at LHS exceeds the capacity of the proposed SRCCCY program by 20 youth. Our Children’s Court judges have expressed concern that our planned SRCCCY will be insufficient in capacity to meet the need for placements.

With the anticipated budget challenges imposed by the COVID crisis and the reduction of \$8.4 million in state grant funding for the SRCCCY, there are limited alternatives to increase capacity in the SRCCCY should the need remain by the time LHS closes in 2021. Any possible scenarios that do not include the opening of an SRCCCY will involve the potential of even more expensive and less predictable costs involving purchase of beds from other counties or continuing to rely on placement in the state correctional institutions. This will harm our youth and impede our progress toward a safer, more effective, fair, and equitable youth justice system.

In addition to the capacity concerns, there will be a challenge in meeting the annual ongoing operational costs of the SRCCCY. Because of differences in economies of scale, the daily costs associated with salaries, supplies, meals, medical care, etc. of a new SRCCCY could exceed the current daily rate charged by the DOC for placement of youth at LHS. The only way to manage these costs will be to pursue the lowest census possible within the facility.

Throughout the year-long planning process for the SRCCY application, DHHS and DYFS leaders had to reconcile strongly held values in promoting the highest quality community-based service and the need to mitigate racial disparities within the deepest end of the youth justice system with the desire to establish more effective and humane care for youth who require secure care. Our assertion that Act 185 should be about more than “bricks and mortar,” and should use available resources to promote a more fair and just system that serves youth closer to home and in alternatives to correctional placements, was largely lost on legislators and state officials administering the Act. However, as we continue to forge a path toward the post-LHS era, we must find a way to remain true to our values and not allow limited resources or uncontrolled costs to erode our investment in the community. In fact, the best path forward involves finding a way to increase that investment.

The most cost effective solution is to take aggressive actions to reduce the population below the maximum proposed capacity of 32 as soon as possible and prior to the closing of LHS and CLS in 2021. In addition, it will be necessary to increase our level of engagement and scope of support and influence within the community to address structural racism and disparities.

Other jurisdictions around the country are also exploring strategies to reduce or eliminate the need to detain youth. Jurisdictions like Ramsey and Hennepin Counties, Minnesota and the City of San Francisco have recently announced the anticipated closing of their detention centers due to reduced need and a paradigm shift away from secure congregate care settings to smaller, more community-based settings.

King County, Washington’s Zero Youth Detention initiative is administered through the county’s public health department and is perhaps the most comprehensive model in the country. Their Zero Youth Detention Roadmap outlines five objectives that include leading with racial equity, preventing youth from entering the youth justice system, optimizing diversion alternatives, supporting youth and families to reduce recurrences of contact with the justice system, and aligning and optimizing connections between systems to increase effectiveness. In March of 2019, King County hired a Project Director to oversee the Zero Youth Detention initiative.

As a result of the January 2020 site visit, the Columbia Justice Lab outlined observations and recommendations for zeroing out corrections placements in Milwaukee County. Among the recommendations is the establishment of a position that would work closely with the Division Administrator and system partners to manage and facilitate large-scale initiatives that mitigate the need for secure placements of youth.

### **Proposed Position Creation: Project Manager**

Based on this recommendation and the need to implement targeted strategies to drastically reduce the need for correctional placements, DYFS is requesting the creation of a new position titled Project Manager that will report directly to the Division Administrator and will be responsible for managing, facilitating, messaging, and developing effective programs, policies,

and practices to drastically reduce the average daily population of Milwaukee County youth placed in secure post-disposition settings.

### **Job Description**

The Project Manager's job duties would include:

- Manage and facilitate the division's efforts in achieving racial equity and eliminating racial disparities within the youth justice system.
- Work with department and division staff, justice system stakeholders, youth and their families, community members, and providers to develop and produce a Zero Youth Corrections Road Map for Milwaukee County.
- Manage and direct the efforts of the "Zero In" and "All Out" work teams.
- Collaborate with other division leaders on efforts to implement the five current strategies to reduce correctional placements:
  - Expansion of community-based programming alternatives.
  - Work in conjunction with one of the Deputy Administrators to develop a continuum of care between Bakari and MCAP and another Deputy Administrator to develop alternatives to revocation.
  - Exercising the policy levers developed in conjunction with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
  - Re-invest cost savings into community-based alternatives.
- Lead community outreach efforts for the Division, including the establishment of participatory budgeting.
- Serve as a liaison and resource for smaller community-based youth advocacy agencies, especially those that are minority led, with the aim of expanding their influence and capacity.
- Design and manage a Zero Youth Corrections dashboard to be accessible to the public.
- Manage and direct the division's efforts to develop supportive adult programming for youth:
  - Oversee the recruitment of mentors and Credible Messengers.
  - Oversee family finding efforts.
  - Oversee efforts to achieve the goal of establishing or identifying at least one durable, positive, pro-social adult relationship for every youth who enters our system.
  - Establish and monitor outcomes for supportive adult programming.

The ideal candidate would have the following qualifications:

- Background in public health, violence prevention, or prison/corrections reduction.
- Previous project management experience.
- Demonstrated experience in community organizing and youth engagement in Milwaukee.

- Strong leadership and communication skills.

The Project Manager would be an upper administrative position within the division. The following action is requested:

Position Title	Action	FTE	Pay Grade
Project Manager	Create	1.0	33M - NR

	Rate	Annual Salary	2020 Salary Cost (Effective Pay Period 22)	SS	Total Cost
Low Range	\$35.03	\$72,862	\$15,133	\$1,158	\$16,291
High Range	\$41.75	\$86,840	\$18,036	\$1,380	\$19,416

### **Recommendation**

The Interim Director, Department of Health and Human Services and Department on Aging, recommends the creation of one FTE Project Manager position in the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS).

### **Fiscal Impact**

Depending upon the placement in the pay range, the salary and social security cost of the Project Manager ranges between \$16,291 to \$19,416 in 2020 (as of pay period 22 in October) and \$72,862 to \$86,840 annually. The cost for this position is anticipated to be covered for two years by a contribution from a private foundation. It is anticipated that this position will result in significant reductions in youth incarceration and will be sustainable within the DYFS budget after the private foundation funds are discontinued.

DYFS is awaiting final approval from the foundation's board of directors in September. DYFS has already received a verbal commitment from the foundation and is extremely optimistic the board of directors will approve the funding. However, if this does not occur, DYFS would utilize savings realized by the reduction in the ADP which is expected to produce a savings of about \$3.3 million for 2020.

*Shakita LaGrant-McClain*

Shakita LaGrant/Interim Director

Department of Health and Human Services & Department on Aging

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