



Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition

Disability Rights Wisconsin ♦ Madison Area Accredited Early Childhood Association
Milwaukee Child Care Alliance ♦ Parents Plus ♦ School Administrators Alliance
Supporting Families Together Association ♦ Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
Wisconsin Association of School Boards ♦ Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association
Wisconsin Council for Exceptional Children - Division for Early Childhood
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families ♦ Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Wisconsin Family Child Care Association ♦ Wisconsin Head Start Association

Coalition Position on YoungStar Proposal Under Consideration by the Joint Committee on Finance June 2010

The 14-member Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition strongly supports approval of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) **YoungStar** proposal for a child care Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

Specifically, we urge Joint Committee on Finance members to vote for Alternative 1 from the Legislative Fiscal Bureau's May 24, 2010 paper on the section 13.10 request by the Department of Children and Families to fund their **YoungStar** plan.

Our Coalition represents thousands of early childhood professionals, parents, and advocates. Leaders in our field have been working diligently since June 2004 on a system to bring quality standards, incentives, accountability, and consumer information to assure quality child care programs, particularly in the rapidly growing Wisconsin Shares subsidy program. Past proposals have been rejected largely because of the growing costs of serving eligible families in Wisconsin Shares, currently budgeted at \$385 million.

We believe more than ever that now is the time to launch a robust quality assurance component of Wisconsin Shares to assure that tax dollars are spent wisely and that vulnerable children are getting the quality services they deserve. The low-income children served by the Wisconsin Shares system are at potentially high risk for difficulty in school and beyond.

Extensive research demonstrates that investment in high-quality early learning programs is a sound investment, producing significant short- and long-term benefits, including achievement in school, reduced need for special education, increased inclusion of children with disabilities, lower crime rates, and higher earnings, with particularly strong results for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The QRIS proposal is an important step in the right direction

Due largely to the enforcement work of the Department of Children and Families, teaming with law enforcement officials, the Wisconsin Shares for the current biennium is

expected to spend \$104.5 million less than budgeted, according to the Fiscal Bureau paper. It is more than reasonable to invest 10 percent of that amount to assure that Wisconsin Shares is about quality services, not just about parking children in child care slots.

We do not support Alternative 2, which would fund a pilot program. We believe that we know enough now to proceed with a sound QRIS. We strongly support the phase-in approach the Department is recommending (Alternative 1). QRIS approaches have been discussed and piloted for several years in Wisconsin, and we have been able to learn lessons from the 20 states that have implemented QRIS. State government, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Supporting Families Together Association, has been piloting key aspects of a quality improvement for several years, most recently evidenced by both the Grow in Quality project in 2005-07 and the more comprehensive Together Quality Grows in 2009. The YoungStar proposal is not a new model-- it's based on careful pilots and research.

Wisconsin is behind the curve when it comes to fiscal accountability and quality assurance of the child care services purchased through Wisconsin Shares. It's time to take this important step for Wisconsin's children.

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