

MISMANAGEMENT: SOCIAL SERVICES DISASTER

"Milwaukee County has demonstrated a sustained inability to successfully provide services... The working families of Milwaukee County continue to be denied critical services."

– Karen Timberlake, Director
Dept. of Health & Human Services

Over 95% of calls to the county public assistance office went unanswered, despite receiving more state funds than any other county

Early reports of Milw. Co. welfare office failing

The Milwaukee County welfare office has been overwhelmed with a record number of people seeking public assistance while the size of its staff has declined. The state mandates that Milwaukee County run the local public assistance programs, and it provides about a \$16.5 million annual budget. Stephanie Marquis, a spokeswoman for the state agency, said that, if the county does not eventually meet that mark, the state could withhold funding for the entire program.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 01/14/2008]

Walker failed to fully staff the center

Dave Eisner, president of the union local that represents call center workers, said there's no need to go outside to find more workers. Walker's administration had money budgeted to more fully staff the center but has failed to do so, Eisner said. "Their solution to it was, 'Let's get rid of it,' " Eisner said. County employees have the training and experience to do the job well, but not when too few are assigned to the center, he said.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/22/2008]

State takes over county's public assistance programs

The state's takeover was "prompted by years of county mismanagement, state Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake said."

The state "has in fact expended millions of additional dollars and thousands of hours of staff resources to assist your county over a period of years," Timberlake wrote. "Despite these efforts, Milwaukee County's performance fails national and state standards and is failing the people of the county."

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 02/04/2009]

"...Sustained inability to successfully provide Income Maintenance program services to its residents, resulting in the deprivation of food assistance, eligibility for medical care, and assistance with subsidized childcare to thousands of Milwaukee County residents."

- Milwaukee County received more funding per capita than any other county for Income Maintenance program functions.
- Less than 5% of the incoming calls were answered for assistance to the county run call center.
- One out of every five FoodShare recipients were cut from the program in error in a given year.
- The FoodShare error rate increased from 6.2% in 2003 to 19.54% in 2008.
- Milwaukee County got more money than any other county:
 - 62% of Milwaukee's Income Maintenance programs were funded by the state, vs. 57% for the rest of the counties;
 - After Milwaukee, the next five largest counties received just 47% of IM funding from the state;
 - Milwaukee County had to pay just 15% of the total program costs for IM, while other counties were funding on average 23% of IM costs.
- Two-thirds of all complaints received by the state W-2 agencies are problems Milwaukee County residents are having with the County's FoodShare, Medicaid and child care programs.
- The county was warned as far back as 2005 that the administration of food stamps was not meeting state and federal standards and must be improved. The county was having the same problems and making the same errors four years later.
- The state and county paid over \$74,000 in penalties for delays and errors in service.
- The state and county were sued for failing to provide Medicaid and food stamp services in a timely manner.
- The state was receiving 250 to 300 calls per day from disgruntled Milwaukee County residents who were not receiving assistance through the Milwaukee County call center.
- Only 70% of benefit applications were handled within state and federal timelines, vs 85% for the rest of the state.
- Over 60% of case closures were certified as eligible for benefits within 2 months of closures.
- 92% of Milwaukee recipients of FoodShare/Medicaid also get Wisconsin Shares child care assistance.
- The County authorized 91% of all subsidy requests, vs 58% for the rest of the state – inadequate county oversight of authorized hours of Shares care for families.
[Source: Letter to Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker, from Secretary of Health Services Karen Timberlake, dated February 3, 200]

QUICK QUOTES

"Milwaukee County has demonstrated a sustained inability to successfully provide services to its (poor) customers," Timberlake said in a letter to Walker. The state "has in fact expended millions of additional dollars and thousands of hours of staff resources to assist your county over a period of years," Timberlake wrote. "Despite these efforts, Milwaukee County's performance fails national and state standards and is failing the people of the county." [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 02/04/2009]

"Their solution to it was, 'Let's get rid of it,' " Eisner said. County employees have the training and experience to do the job well, but not when too few are assigned to the center, he said.
[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 10/22/2008]

"The call center is not rocket science; it's just been really mismanaged," Supervisor Elizabeth M. Coggs said. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 11/20/2008]

"Milwaukee County has reached a low point in its (public aid) delivery service," Pat DeLessio, a Legal Action of Wisconsin lawyer suing the county, said in a letter to the County Board. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12/02/2008]

"If people just don't want it contracted out, there's not a good way to appease that," Walker said. He wants the call center privatization to get more bang for the county's buck, Walker said. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12/02/2008]

"The impacts are horrible," Kunze said, noting some who deserved benefits gave up trying. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12/02/2008]