

## **MHTF 2020 Milwaukee County Budget Concerns:**

### **2020 Budget Calendar:**

- April 2019: Operating Budget Instructions issued to departments
- July 15, 2019: Department Budget requests due
- Aug. 13-20, 2019: Milwaukee County Public Engagement Sessions
- October 1, 2019: County Executive Recommended Budget Released
- October 2019: Finance Committee Hearings
- November 4, 2019: County Board Budget Hearing
- November 7, 2019: 2020 Budget Adopted by County Board
- January 2020: Budget Implemented

### **Decreasing Revenue: Fair Deal Proposal –**

[county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Board-of-Supervisors/Fair-Deal](https://www.county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Board-of-Supervisors/Fair-Deal)

Milwaukee County's ability to generate revenue is limited by state laws. This leads to two problems, both of which are growing worse. The first is a lack of adequate funding for operations, which leads to a budget gap that must be closed each year. The second is an inability to fund urgently needed repairs to crumbling infrastructure and invest in the future. The annual budget gap for operations is projected to grow to \$80 million by 2023. The capital budget will face a nearly \$100 million gap in 2020.

County Board Chairman Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., and Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele are leading the effort to prevent a serious crisis. The Fair Deal for Milwaukee County Workgroup, which they co-chair, has identified and proposed the following:

These recommendations represent shared priorities in strengthening the partnership between Milwaukee County and the State of Wisconsin:

- Allowing Milwaukee County local control to generate new revenue and reduce the current reliance on property taxes through a binding referendum process
- Increased, fair contributions from the state toward the provision of current and any new state-mandated services
- Fully reimbursing the County for the cost of patrolling freeways (Milwaukee County is the only Wisconsin county required by state law to patrol freeways)
- Equally sharing Circuit Court and Register of Deeds fees collected by the County (currently 80% goes to the state and 20% remains with the County)
- Adjusting state Shared Revenue payments and other state aids to align with any inflationary increases in the cost of adequately providing public programs and services
- Accepting federal funds to expand BadgerCare coverage for 80,000 Wisconsin residents
- Adequately funding any youth justice facilities located in the County
- Rejecting any reduction in existing funding below amounts received in the 2019 Adopted Budget

### **Transportation**

Access to transportation, both transit and paratransit, is vital for people with mental illness and other disabilities, as so many do not drive due to their disability or because they cannot afford a car. Transit and paratransit are critical to the ability of Milwaukee County residents with mental illness and other disabilities to live independently and to access disability related services, get to jobs, grocery shopping, participate in support groups, attend recovery programs, worship, etc.

We are very concerned regarding the route cuts proposed in the MCTS budget request, and understand that you share these concerns. We ask policy makers to do everything possible to limit the route cuts, and to consider possible alternatives to fund these vital services, understanding that the options are limited. We are committed to continuing our advocacy to increase funding for transit in the state budget.

It is encouraging to see that the MCTS budget request maintains the current paratransit service area, and does not increase fares. The MHTF asks that this be maintained in the County Exec's 2020 budget.

### **Respite Funding**

The DHHS budget requests proposes elimination of a \$211,000 contract for respite services for Milwaukee children with significant disabilities and their families. The rationale for this is that "the majority of customers are children whose respite is eligible under the CLTS program which is funded by Medicaid."

The MHTF asks this cut be reconsidered, as we believe that there is a continuing need to provide some funding for respite services outside of and in addition to the Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) Medicaid waiver funded respite services, and ask you to maintain funding in the budget for respite services for these vulnerable children and families.

Milwaukee County is to be commended for supporting this respite services for families who have a child with a significant disability. Many struggle with their caregiving responsibilities and may not be able to continue to work due to the responsibilities of caring for a child with significant needs. It is especially noteworthy that the current program has primarily served Latino and African American children and families; in our work with Milwaukee families we have seen that families of color often experience additional barriers to accessing services and supports for their child with a disability.

Continued funding is needed for several reasons:

- It can take time for families to obtain eligibility for CLTS and for families to obtain Medicaid for their child through Katie Beckett, when needed. It is not unusual for the process to take months. In these cases, the respite contract funding is a bridge that provides support while families navigate what can be a lengthy and intimidating process.
- Some families who have a child with complex medical needs or disability who may not be eligible for CLTS. The respite contract provides another way to access this important support.
- A transition plan is needed to assess the families currently receiving respite services through the contract, and to support them with this transition. It should be a priority to maintain continuity of care for families, including the significant number of families from underserved communities who rely on this contract. Based on our Milwaukee outreach project, families of color often experience additional barriers to obtaining a diagnosis for their child and accessing supports.
- In recent months, Milwaukee County CLTS families have experienced delays with payment of respite services. DHHS / DSD is making progress in addressing these concerns. Nonetheless, the recent history does raise concerns that it may be challenging for the County system to add a significant number of additional families who rely on respite services.

Given that the current respite contract has been successful at supporting families from underserved communities, is serving families who may not be eligible for CLTS, and the concerns with the current administration of respite services for Milwaukee County CLTS families, we recommend that Milwaukee County continue to provide funding for respite services outside of CLTS.