**Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force 2020 Milwaukee County Budget Priorities**

**Draft 10/9/2019**

Milwaukee County and the funding provided by the County Budget is a critical part of the safety net for children and adults with disabilities, including mental health needs. We ask policy makers to protect the services and supports that are vital to children and adults with disabilities and mental health needs, and that advance recovery and independence.

**Decreasing Revenue: Fair Deal Proposal –**

Milwaukee County's ability to generate revenue is limited by state laws. This restriction has limited funding for vital services, as well funding for urgently needed repairs to crumbling infrastructure and invest in the future. The Mental Health Task Force supports the Milwaukee County Fair Deal Proposal to address the need for additional revenue and equity.

**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 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.
* As proposed in the 2020 budget, maintain the current paratransit service area, and do not increase fares.

**Reform of the Justice System.**

The Mental Health Task Force supports the proposal to increase use of electronic monitoring for Huber inmates. This proposal would increase opportunities for more inmates to obtain and maintain employment, because they will have access to mass transit resources not available from the House of Correction. In addition, this proposal would provide better supervision of inmates when they are in the community through direct monitoring of their activities and movement between said activities.

**Housing and Emergency Shelters**

The Mental Health Task Force supports budget investments in the Milwaukee County Housing Division. Housing First is an evidence based practice which has had a tremendous positive impact for Milwaukee County residents with mental illness. We strongly support this collaboration and funding and hope there are opportunities to expand it to meet significant community need. Recovery is not possible without stable safe housing.

We ask policy makers to continue current support for the emergency shelter network. Even in a Housing First model of service, it is extremely important that Emergency Shelters remain a part of the continuum, giving literally homeless individuals a place to go as they are in the process of being housed. Emergency Shelters in Milwaukee served over 5,500 unduplicated people in Shelter in 2016.

**Respite Funding**

The DHHS budget eliminates a $211,000 contract for respite services for Milwaukee children with significant disabilities and their families. The justification is that “the majority of customers are children whose respite is eligible under the CLTS program which is funded by Medicaid.” The budget also states that “children that are determined to be ineligible for CLTS but receive a medical diagnosis from their physician will continue to receive respite services under DSD’s non-waiver funding sources.”

The Mental Health Task Force supports continuation of funding for respite services outside of and in addition to the Children’s Long Term Support (CLTS) Medicaid waiver funded respite services. We are working with Disability Services to better understand what other funding will be available and how families will access it and whether that will meet community needs.

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.