

Testimony :

Budget hearing

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Tonight I want to talk about early childhood education in Madison and the situation we are in at this time in history. One point that I hope to make is the importance of looking at the city child care and community services budget, whenever possible, within the broader context of state and federal programs to maximize resources to help children, families and seniors within the city.

The early childhood program is a good example of that. It was started almost 40 years ago as an economic development program as well as a means to improve conditions for children. The idea was that if Madison provided high quality programs for young children, it would attract skilled young families who could contribute to the growth of the economy. Years later that approach has proven itself – while many parts of Wisconsin are losing young skilled workers, Madison is retaining and gaining them. With 60% of the preschool enrollment in the city in high quality accredited programs, Madison leads the nation in this area- with more high quality slots than 20 of the states.

The rest of the country has taken notice. The national accreditation program was started after Madison's. A number of states, including Wisconsin, have set up programs to improve the quality of their early childhood programs. Today city accredited programs monthly serve about 759 low income children on Wisconsin Shares that draws down about \$5 million a year in state and federal revenue. About a half million dollars of that are because of quality bonuses as a result of city accreditation. In the rest of Dane County, the additional quality payments are about \$29,000 a year.

During the recession last year the city fared better than the county. Enrollment in Child Care dropped 4% in Dane County and increased 2% in the city. City accredited care overall fared better than non-accredited care

That may change for the better a year from now. After 12 years of work, we finally got the quality rating system (QRS) passed in Wisconsin. If it gets totally implemented, in 2012 or 2013 that will result in doubling the bonus percentage paid out for accredited care. The half million currently received by city accredited programs could increase to a million- or higher if the new rate causes accredited programs to serve more high risk low income children.

This will increase demand for city accreditation, which should be limited to programs inside the City of Madison to encourage Dane County to finally work on quality issues related to child care. It may also open up opportunities for exporting the city accreditation model to other parts of the state. As such it is critical to keep the child care section strong during the next biennia as the benefits to the city for supporting quality child care may be considerable.

So I urge you to follow the Mayor's lead and continue to support the Child Care and Early Childhood section of the city budget both the city accreditation program and the grants to community programs. I also urge you to advocate for the continuation of the Youngstar Quality Ratings System program at the state level next year. It is good for children and rewards Madison for its decades of support for high quality programs.

Finally I thank the Mayor for adding \$200,000 in to the budget for contracted community service programs. I would caution you however to target those funds first for cost of living increases for existing programs and second to fund critical existing programs on the waiting list that serve high numbers of low income people. I say this in spite of the fact 4-C has new programs we would like to get funded. Non-profits however that applied for continuation funding this year were discouraged from requesting cost of living increases so most do not have them. There is a good possibility that some state and federal funding for human services will be cut next year- we will have a better sense after November 2nd. As such it makes more sense to provide a COLA now than to create additional programs that will desperately need it next year

Thank you again for your past support and your dedication to the city and its people through your service.