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For Immediate Release
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May 30, 2019

County Social Workers Submit Personal Stories to the Governor and Legislature about the Frontlines of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Crisis
Letters Highlight Real Life Impact of Drugs and the Youngest Victims of Epidemic

County social workers are on the frontlines of the meth and opioid epidemic. On a daily basis this group of dedicated county staff respond to calls for help on behalf of children who, through no fault of their own, have fallen victim to this crisis.

“The Wisconsin child welfare crisis is staggering, with the opioid/meth epidemic having a profound impact on the youngest victims,” said Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) Executive Director Mark D. O’Connell. “The magnitude of the challenge in the form of exploding caseloads is exceeding the ability of counties to adequately deliver the services our citizens need.”

According to WCA, the complexity of the cases social workers respond to has increased as well, as alcohol and drug addiction adds an additional level of involvedness to a case. All of this leads to increased turnover and secondary trauma for county social workers; but, more importantly, leads to increased time in out-of-home care for children, delaying how long it takes for a child reach permanency.

Earlier this year, WCA asked social workers from across the state to pen letters outlining the impact Wisconsin’s child welfare crisis has on their ability to effectively perform their job duties. These letters have been submitted today to both Governor Evers and the Legislature.

Excerpts from county social workers’ letters include:

- “The increase in drug cases has created a hardship for counties in several ways leading families to not receiving the help they need to put themselves back together.” –*Trempealeau County Ongoing Case Manager*
- “My worker was stuck by a used needle that a parent that was known to use illegal substances had hidden in his coat pocket. This resulted in my worker having to seek immediate medical attention and a different worker having to stop what he/she was doing to respond to the home to complete the investigation.” –*Trempealeau County Family and Children Services Supervisor*

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- “Through the years, the growing number of children and families that require intervention to ensure the safety of children only continues to grow at alarming rates across the state. Drug endangered and affected children are consuming the daily work of child welfare workers who have become accustomed to witnessing families be torn apart because of addiction.” -*Wood County Social Work Supervisor*
- “Workers now have additional safety training and clothing to wear while entering a drug home or doing assessments because of the dangerous repercussions of the chemicals and drugs. The CPS worker and the intense job they do every day is not even believable some days to the workers themselves. Some of the horrible things that they see and deal with would not be feasible to the public.” -*Oneida County Certified Social Worker*
- “We have an opportunity at this time to make a difference for all children and families of Wisconsin. I personally have seen how putting the time and building relationships with these children and families have made a difference. We could just make so much more of a difference with the support of the Wisconsin State Legislature.” -*Kewaunee County Social Worker*
- “During home visits, I no longer feel safe to do my job. I am part of the Drug Endangered Children (DEC) team and the drug metro detectives that are involved on the team indicated that we should start carrying Narcan, like they do, in case we accidentally ingest Fentanyl on a home visit.” -*Manitowoc County Social Worker*
- “Above all the trauma these children are unfortunately exposed to living in these unsafe environments have unspeakable lifelong effects. It is not uncommon for drug use to be generational, as children being raised watching others around them to be involved with drugs. At a recent emergency drug raid I was on, a 14-year old child told me he fears he will grow up to be a ‘druggie’ and a drug dealer because everyone else around him has always been that way. This child has lost hope in people and his ability to trust anyone.” -*Manitowoc County Social Worker*

View all the powerful letters from county social workers here: <https://bit.ly/2XgdYA6>

For more information on the #WICildWelfareCrisis and to view videos of county social workers sharing their up close and personal experiences, visit <https://wichildwelfarecrisis.wicounties.org>.

The Wisconsin Counties Association represents the interests of county governments at both the state and federal levels and is located in Madison, Wisconsin. Learn more at www.wicounties.org and find WCA on Facebook and Twitter (@WisCounties).

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