

**RESOLUTION**

**ROCK COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

Human Services Board  
 INITIATED BY



1/20/2022  
 DATE DRAFTED

**Authorizing Contract with Butler Institute for Families to Conduct Child Welfare Assessment**

**WHEREAS,** Resolution 21-10A-342 directed the County Administrator to identify and develop a contract with a consultant with expert knowledge of child welfare to assess Rock County’s child welfare system; and

**WHEREAS,** Resolution 21-10A-342 directed that the assessment include:

- broad input from system stakeholders, including birth parents, foster parents, court personnel, Rock County staff, service providers, the Department of Children and Families, and other interested parties;
- a review of local and statewide data on child welfare performance and outcome indicators;
- an in-depth review of child welfare case practice, services, and supports, as well as random case reviews;
- context regarding and coordination with other ongoing efforts in Rock County and the State of Wisconsin regarding changes in child welfare standards, practice, policies, and laws, as well as changes that are being required by the federal government; and
- recommendations for system improvement; and

**WHEREAS,** the County Administrator has sought out and received proposals from three consultants, including:

- Butler Institute for Families, housed in the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver (Denver, Colorado);
- Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (Montgomery, Alabama); and
- ICF (Fairfax, Virginia); and

**WHEREAS,** after reviewing the proposals, the County Administrator recommends entering into a contract with the Butler Institute to conduct an assessment of Rock County’s child welfare system.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED,** that the Rock County Board of Supervisors duly assembled this 27th day of January, 2022, does hereby authorize a contract with the Butler Institute for Families to conduct an assessment of Rock County’s child welfare system at a cost of \$114,300.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** a 10% contingency of \$11,430 is to be included in the project budget to address additional or expanded services that may be identified as necessary during the course of the review to complete the assessment, bringing the total project budget to \$125,730.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** the 2022 budget be amended as follows:

| <b>Account</b>   | <b>Budget</b> | <b>Increase<br/>(Decrease)</b> | <b>Amended Budget</b> |
|--|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Source of Funds<br>36-3634-0000-47000<br>Transfer from General<br>Fund | -0-           | \$125,730                      | \$125,730             |

|                     |     |           |           |
|---------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| Use of Funds        | -0- | \$125,730 | \$125,730 |
| 36-3634-0000-62104  |     |           |           |
| Consulting Services |     |           |           |

FISCAL NOTE:

This resolution approves a transfer of \$125,730 from the General Fund to fund this contract.

/s/Sherry Oja

Sherry Oja  
Finance Director

LEGAL NOTE:

The County Board is authorized to take this action pursuant to §§ 59.01 and 59.51, Wis. Stats. Professional services are not subject to bidding requirements of § 59.52(29), Stats. As an amendment to the adopted 2022 County Budget, this Resolution requires a 2/3 vote of the entire membership of the County Board pursuant to § 65.90(5)(a), Wis. Stats.

/s/Richard Greenlee

Richard Greenlee  
Corporation Counsel

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTE:

Recommended.

/s/Josh Smith

Josh Smith  
County Administrator

**Committee Action**

Human Services Board

The Human Services Board Committee recommended this resolution for approval by a unanimous voice vote. Angelina Reyes and Supervisor Pam Bostwick were absent.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee recommended this resolution for approval by a unanimous voice vote.

**ROCK COUNTY, WISCONSIN**



**County Administrator**  
51 South Main Street  
Janesville, WI 53545  
(608)757-5510  
Fax (608)757-5511

DATE: January 20, 2022  
TO: Human Services Board  
FROM: Josh Smith, County Administrator *JMS*  
RE: Recommendation of Consultant to Conduct Child Welfare System Assessment

This memo is intended to communicate my rationale for recommending that the Butler Institute for Families, housed in the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver, conduct an assessment of Rock County’s child welfare system.

Background

At its meeting on October 14, 2021, the County Board adopted Resolution 21-10A-342, which “directs the County Administrator to identify and develop a contract with a consultant with expert knowledge of child welfare to assess Rock County’s child welfare system.” The resolution identified that the assessment is to include the following five areas:

- 1) Broad input from system stakeholders, including birth parents, foster parents, court personnel, Rock County staff, service providers, the Department of Children and Families, and other interested parties.
- 2) A review of local and statewide data on child welfare performance and outcome indicators.
- 3) An in-depth review of child welfare case practice, services, and supports, as well as random case reviews.
- 4) Context regarding and coordination with other ongoing efforts in Rock County and the State of Wisconsin regarding changes in child welfare standards, practice, policies, and laws, as well as changes that are being required by the federal government.
- 5) Recommendations for system improvement.

Process

To identify possible consultants, I asked stakeholders for suggestions and sought input from officials in the State Department of Children and Families Division of Safety and Permanence, which has oversight for the child welfare services counties provide on behalf of the State of Wisconsin.

After reviewing the suggestions and conducting background research online, I sought and received proposals from three consultants:

- Butler Institute for Families (Denver, Colorado)
- Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (Montgomery, Alabama)
- ICF (Fairfax, Virginia)

In order to facilitate the submittal of proposals, I shared the County Board resolution with each consultant, held several conversations with each to provide further background information and answer questions, and provided Rock County Child Protective Services (CPS) statistics and information.

After receiving the initial proposals, Jodie Surber, Analyst in the County Administrator's Office, and I reviewed them. In comparing the proposals and their approaches, we identified that the proposal from the Butler Institute did not include focus groups as part of its stakeholder input strategy, and the proposal from the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group proposed a more limited number of file reviews. Because both of these elements are of high importance to the system stakeholders, I reached back out to these two consultants to gather more information. This resulted in updated proposals from these two consultants. All three proposals are included in the Human Services Board agenda packet for your more detailed review.

I also conducted several reference checks by speaking or exchanging emails with the following organizations:

- For the Butler Institute
  - Fairfax County (Virginia) Department of Family Services
  - New York State Office of Children and Family Services
  - Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Division of Family and Community Services
- For the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group
  - UW-Madison School of Social Work
  - Indiana Department of Child Services
  - Iowa Department of Human Services, Division of Adult, Children and Family Services
  - City of Philadelphia Health and Human Services
  - Lee County (Alabama) Youth Development Center
- For ICF
  - San Francisco Human Services Agency

#### Recommendation Rationale

Table 1 compares several important elements of each proposal, including cost, timeline, number of cases proposed to be reviewed, and the strategy for getting input from stakeholders.

**Table 1**

|                   | Butler Institute  | Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group  | ICF  |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| Cost              | \$114,300   | \$98,400   | \$334,000 (low)<br>\$350,600 (high)  |
| Timeline          | 6 months  | 6 months   | 12 months  |
| Case Review       | ~100 open cases<br>~100 screened-out reports  | 40 cases   | 25-30 cases  |
| Stakeholder Input | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11-13 focus groups</li> <li>• 3-5 interviews</li> <li>• 75 people total</li> <li>• Stakeholder steering committee</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 focus groups</li> <li>• 12 interviews</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 focus groups</li> <li>• 100 people total</li> <li>• Online survey</li> </ul> |

Based on the proposals submitted, all three consultants are qualified to conduct child welfare system assessments consistent with the County Board resolution and have significant expertise in the field of child welfare. However, I am recommending the Butler Institute because its proposal offers the best balance of case reviews and stakeholder input, which I believe are the two most important elements of the assessment. Each area identified in the County Board resolution is discussed in greater detail below.

*Review of Case Practice, Services, and Supports/Case Reviews*

Rock County stakeholders have indicated the importance of random case reviews in evaluating the child welfare practices of the department, including related to decisions affecting child safety.

To assess how many file reviews would be typical to review when conducting an assessment, I asked staff from the State Department of Children and Families Bureau of Performance Management for input. State staff calculated the number of cases that should be reviewed based on the average annual number of cases in Rock County and the recommendations from the Children’s Bureau in the federal Department of Health and Human Services regarding the number of cases needed for a representative sample. These are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

| Type of Case                        | Approximate Number of Cases in Rock County | Representative Sample |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Access Reports                      | 3,000                                      | 250                   |
| Initial Assessments Approved        | 1,000                                      | 215                   |
| Ongoing<br>(out-of-home placements) | 100  |                       |
| (ongoing child welfare cases)       | 130  | 75                    |
| Total                               | 4,230                                      | 540                   |

Source: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Bureau of Performance Management

As shown in Table 2, a representative sample would include approximately 540 case reviews. Because a representative sample is often not achievable, State staff suggested to review a minimum of between 50-100 cases. While the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group's proposal approaches the bottom of this range, with ICF offering slightly fewer, Butler Institute's proposal contains significantly more case reviews and therefore would provide greater insight into current CPS practice.

I would note that the decisions to review a smaller number of cases on the part of the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group and ICF are intentional and consistent with their philosophies that reviewing a more limited number of cases can allow valid conclusions to be drawn about practice when coupled with stakeholder input. In addition, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group proposes to separately assess areas such as organizational structure and capacity, resource needs, policies and quality assurance mechanisms, staffing patterns, and professional development outside of the case review process. This speaks to the differing approaches the consultants propose to assess the child welfare system.

However, because of the importance on ensuring the safety of children in the County's system, placing an emphasis on case reviews as the best tool to evaluate actual child safety decisions seems most appropriate and is most consistent with the Butler Institute's proposal. Themes identified in the case review would then lead to discussions regarding areas for improvement.

Further, the Butler Institute proposes to involve CPS staff as part of case review teams, an approach it employed through a contract with the state of New York to assess child welfare practice in several counties. This approach would help facilitate both case reviews and staff learning. As part of its case review team, Butler Institute also would employ a consultant who is a Wisconsin-based and licensed social worker with considerable experience and understanding of child welfare in the state. The Butler Institute case review process would also include follow-up interviews with involved parties and stakeholders for further verification.

### Stakeholder Input

Each of the proposals offers a slightly different approach to gathering stakeholder input. Specifically, and as shown in Table 1:

- the Butler Institute offers focus groups, interviews, and a stakeholder steering committee;
- the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group offers the most focus groups and interviews; and
- ICF offers the fewest focus groups but would utilize an online survey.

Each approach would have its advantages in collecting input. For example, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group offers the most number of focus groups, providing increased opportunities for stakeholders to share their perspectives, while ICF's online survey might have the greatest reach.

However, the Butler Institute proposal offers a unique opportunity for ongoing stakeholder collaboration and engagement through its stakeholder steering committee. This steering committee would help develop questions, review the file data collection tool, and provide oversight to the case review process. This approach would provide stakeholders the opportunity not just to share their thoughts anecdotally through interviews, but to have ongoing input into and oversight of the case review process, providing a higher quality of stakeholder participation.

### Data Review

The Butler Institute's proposal includes a review of data available on the State's CPS dashboard. The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group offers a more detailed proposal regarding data analysis in areas including intake, in-home services, out-of-home care, and workforce. Similarly, ICF's proposal includes a robust data component and statewide comparison, resulting in more detailed trend analysis.

From a data analysis perspective, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group and ICF offer a more detailed and extensive proposal.

### Context Regarding Child Welfare Changes

The federal Family First Prevention and Services Act (FFPSA) requires changes in how child welfare agencies serve neglected and abused children. As has been discussed, this has contributed to disagreements in Rock County and in many child welfare systems regarding how to safely serve children in their homes and when it is appropriate to remove children and place them in out-of-home care. Implicit in all three proposals is consideration of how implementation of the FFPSA may be changing local practices. Specifically:

- The Butler Institute proposes to develop a FFPSA best practices implementation brief to provide information on how other jurisdictions are addressing these changes.
- While not explicitly noting how it will address the FFPSA in the final report, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group references that it will be cognizant of the effects and influence of the FFPSA in its assessment, including in its case reviews.
- ICF's proposal includes a comparison of FFPSA with current practices, resulting in a summary regarding the County's degree of alignment with the FFPSA.

In this regard, the Butler Institute and ICF would most explicitly address how the FFPSA is affecting child welfare practice.

### Recommendations

All three proposals would provide recommendations on improving the County's child welfare system.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I am recommending the Butler Institute because its proposal provides the best balance of what the County Board resolution asks for, including the higher priority areas of case review and stakeholder input. Specifically:

- Initiating a review of child welfare practice through a case review of actual decisions would identify needed improvements rooted in experience and be less subjective.
- A higher number of case reviews would provide more assurance as to the current state of case practice and areas for improvement.
- Involvement of a Wisconsin-based consultant in the case review process would help to alleviate concerns regarding understanding child welfare laws and practice in Wisconsin.
- A collaborative case review process involving CPS staff is more likely to result in long-term improvements.
- In addition to focus groups and interviews, a stakeholder steering committee would provide an opportunity for concerned parties to engage in direct and ongoing participation in the project.

Butler Institute also would most explicitly address the FFPSA, which is core to understanding changes in child welfare practice that are contributing to local concerns.

Butler Institute proposes completion in the shortest (six month) timeframe. While not the least expensive option, its price is competitive with lowest-cost proposal and provides comparative value for the price.

During the course of the review, it is possible that expanded or additional services may be identified as necessary to complete the assessment. Therefore, I am recommending contingency funding of 10 percent of the amount in the proposal be included in the project budget to address these needs if and when they arise.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at the Human Services Board meeting.