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Governor Doyle Launches Department of Children and Families

Department to Protect Children, Strengthen Families, and Build Communities

MADISON – Governor Jim Doyle today launched the new Department of Children and Families whose mission will be to protect children, strengthen families, and build communities. The Governor also announced the Department’s website includes a new webtool that allows families to research child care providers in the state.

“I want this state to be a place where our kids can grow up knowing that their highest ambitions are never out of reach,” Governor Doyle said. “As I’ve said many times, the single most important thing we can do today to ensure a strong, successful future for Wisconsin is to invest in our kids early – because what we do now will determine exactly what kind of state Wisconsin will be 10, 20 even 50 years from now.”

The new Department of Children and Families will be Wisconsin’s first cabinet agency focused exclusively on promoting the safety, economic and social well-being of kids and families of the state. The Department will be working to:

- Improve strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect through a more coordinated system of home visits;
- Improve foster care and adoption services;
- Increase efforts to help prevent family violence;
- Ensure families have access to high quality child care;
- Ensure that parents are able to secure and maintain meaningful jobs;
- Ensure fathers are engaged in meaningful ways in the lives of their children;
- Build new and effective relationships with Wisconsin families, community groups, health care practitioners, business leaders and other state agencies to develop a new collaborative agenda on caring for children; and
- Find new ways to create safe, healthy, productive, and sustainable communities.

The Governor also announced the launch of a web tool that allows the public to search for licensed child care programs and view any inspection reports, rule violations, enforcement actions taken against them. The database will include the state’s approximately 5,700 a licensed child care programs including family child care programs with up to 8 children, group child care programs with 9 or more children, and day camps.

Individuals will be able to search for information using the facility name, county, city, and/or zip code.

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Currently, the public may only request information regarding a child care program's compliance history by phone, e-mail, mail, or by coming into the state licensing office. Only fourteen other states provide child care licensing information on the Internet.

The web tool can be found at: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/>.

The new department brings together under one roof 30 services currently divided between the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) and the Department of Workforce Development (DWD). The agency will manage the following services:

- Wisconsin Works
- Wisconsin Shares - Child Care Subsidy Program
- Child Support Enforcement
- Child Welfare and Milwaukee Child Welfare
- Home Visitation
- Foster Care
- Special Needs Adoption
- Kinship Care
- Brighter Futures
- Domestic Abuse
- Child Care Licensing
- Community Service Block Grant

Reggie Bicha, 38, of Eau Claire was named Secretary for the Department in November 2007. Bicha has 15 years of social work experience – 12 of those years were in leadership roles, including serving as the Pierce County Director of Human Services. He also served as Vice-President of the Wisconsin County Human Services Association and Chaired the West Central Wisconsin – Care Management Collaborative, which is a group of nine counties and three private organizations working to develop a public/private managed care system to expand Family Care and serve seniors and people with disabilities. Bicha was also appointed by Governor Doyle to the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board in 2003, and was a foster parent from 1995 to 1998.