

February 1, 2017

Allison Cruz, M.S., Ed.
Director, Office of Innovation
Administration on Developmental Disabilities
Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Mary Switzer Building
330 C Street, S.W. Room # 1114
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Ms. Cruz:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Disabilities (Council), in partnership with Disability Rights Wisconsin (Protection and Advocacy, or P&A) and the Waisman Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), want to thank the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) for establishing the Disparities Leadership Academy. Given our demonstrated success in working collaboratively on a variety of projects over the years and our current support for and investment in expanding our cultural competence, we believe we are a strong candidate for this opportunity.

IDENTIFIED DISPARITIES GOAL AND RATIONALE

Our Council has developed a specific disparities objective focused on the African American community in the city of Milwaukee. The objective is: By September 30th, 2021, at least 30 more African American families in the central city Milwaukee will be connected to community supports and have access to the resources they need. Additionally our Council is actively recruiting African American grant applicants and recruiting/supporting African American individuals and families to participate in statewide trainings (e.g. Families conference, Partners in Policymaking, Self-Determination Conference, etc.) This objective is a strong fit with the UCEDD five-year goals of promoting inclusion of all individuals with developmental disability to live in the community and participate in all streams of community life as well as to address health disparities for all individuals with a developmental disability. Similarly, our P&A has identified significant disparities in access to long-term supports for African-American children living in the city of Milwaukee, and has acquired supplemental grant funding to provide outreach and advocacy to families in this demographic group. The primary goal of this project is to increase by at least 15% the number of African-American children with disabilities in Milwaukee who receive appropriate long-term support services to which they are entitled. African Americans living in Milwaukee were specifically selected because of city, state, and nation-wide disparities and the size of the county's population (69.4% of Wisconsin's African American population lives in Milwaukee County). The disparities that African American individuals experience in Milwaukee are visible in the areas of education, unemployment, incarceration, systems participation, and early identification. Supporting data to prioritize African American individuals in Milwaukee include:

- Milwaukee is the most racially segregated city in the United States, and has been identified as the worst city for black Americans to live (24/7 Wall St., 2015).
- In education, African American students in Wisconsin schools are suspended at a rate of 34% (as compared to 4% for white students), the highest rate and largest gap of any state (Losen et. al, 2015).
- Wisconsin has the largest educational achievement gap by race of any state (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The disparity of achievement in Milwaukee is the principal driver of this gap.
- The graduation rate for black students in Wisconsin is 66.1%, while for white students is 92.9%, the largest gap in the country.
- Unemployment for African American men living in Milwaukee is the fifth highest in the nation. Unemployment for African American women is the fourth highest.
- The poverty rate in Milwaukee for African Americans is the second worst in the country, as is the poverty rate gap between blacks and whites (Levine, 2013).
- Wisconsin has the highest black male incarceration rate in the country. Milwaukee schools have been referred to as a “pipeline” to prison for African American youth (Pawasarat & Quinn, 2013).
- White children in Wisconsin are two times more likely to be identified with autism than African American children, (Wisconsin Surveillance of Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities System, 2012); and the Centers for Disease Control estimates black children nationally are diagnosed 18-24 months later than their white peers.

Over the past two years, the Wisconsin AIDD Network has made significant efforts to increase our outreach to and connection with diverse communities. Examples of embedding diversity-related efforts into programs to date include:

- Conducting an extensive self-assessment (using tools from the Cultural and Linguistic Competence Assessment for Disability Organizations developed by the National Center for Cultural Competence) to identify our Council’s strengths and weaknesses in implementing culturally diverse values and practices. Based upon the assessment, an action plan was developed and targeted steps are being implemented to improve our diversity efforts. (Council)
- Appointing an Ad Hoc Diversity Committee to analyze and make recommendations to improve overall outreach and responsiveness to under-represented and culturally diverse individuals, families, and organizations. (Council)
- Engaging several “cultural connectors” from specific cultural communities to assist our Council in identifying areas of priority and engage with diverse communities in meaningful ways. (Council)
- Engaging in a community conversation in Milwaukee with people from the African American and Latino communities that resulted in an action plan indicating steps the Council and its DD Partners could take to better connect with diverse communities in Milwaukee. (Council)
- Involving community connectors and staff in new outreach, dissemination and support strategies resulting in more grant applications from and more attendance at statewide trainings/events by Milwaukee’s African American community. (Council)
- Providing specific transition-related resources, training and opportunities to Milwaukee youth and families--many of whom are from African American and Latino

communities—through the Wisconsin PROMISE Social Security employment project, Let’s Get to Work youth transition project, and Youth Partnership with Parents for Empowerment support youth and families in reaching educational and employment goals. (Council and UCEDD)

- Including a “Milwaukee-Link” for graduate students in health-related professions to work with children with autism and other developmental disabilities, their families, and systems of care in the Wisconsin Maternal and Child Health LEND training program. A priority of this program is to recruit LEND trainees from under-represented groups who plan to live and practice in the city of Milwaukee. As a part of the program, the trainees engage in community service efforts aimed at enhancing supports for families. For example, the trainees provide autism evaluations for children from underserved neighborhoods in Milwaukee. (UCEDD)
- Increasing early diagnosis and entry into services for children with ASD/DD, particularly for medically underserved populations through the Wisconsin Care Integration Initiative, funded by the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health. One of the project activities is a collaboration in Milwaukee to provide community health navigation for families in underserved neighborhoods to reduce health disparities. (UCEDD)
- Engaging DRW staff through its Diversity and Cultural Competence Committee in a series of exercises designed to raise awareness of and sensitivity to racial disparities and cultural privilege, as well as increasing the diversity of its staff and Board (P&A).
- Partnering with other coalitions, faith communities, and provider networks, to hold listening sessions and participate in community awareness events targeted to attract African-American and Latino participants with disabilities (P&A).
- Applying for and receiving a grant from The Greater Milwaukee Foundation for “Equal Treatment: Closing the Service Gap for Milwaukee Children with Disabilities”. In addition to increasing the enrollment of African-American children in CLTS waiver services, the project expects to increase the participation of families in non-CLTS support programs, provide increased legal advocacy to African-American families ensuring the most appropriate community living supports for the child and family, and build a network of Community Connectors who can refer African-American families of children with disabilities in Milwaukee to advocacy and service agencies (P&A).

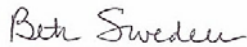
HOW PARTICIPATION WILL HELP ACCOMPLISH OUR STATE GOALS

Participation in the Leadership Academy would provide our network with a framework to accomplish our disparity objective collaboratively, and begin to create system-wide change to reduce the many disparities that are prevalent for African-American individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Wisconsin. Leadership from all three agencies is fully committed to the Academy, and our Council is committing funding to allow one of our volunteer Board members, who also serves as a cultural liaison to our Council, to participate. This Board member is a member of Milwaukee’s African American community and is knowledgeable about opportunities and resources there, as well as those available throughout Wisconsin. She brings lived experience and perspective to our team that would greatly benefit our collaborative efforts. As a long-time Milwaukee resident active in many facets of her community, she has significant and positive connections in the African American and disability communities (e.g. Milwaukee Public Schools, faith-based groups and congregations, disability service systems, black newspaper and radio outlets, etc.) The board and its partners are fully committed to the Academy and will provide the necessary support for team members to engage in all of the required activities, and successfully complete the program, including paying for our volunteer member’s expenses. The leaders of the Wisconsin DD Network organizations are committed to addressing

disparities experienced by African American families in Milwaukee. Each organization will invest staff resources to making this effort a success in alignment with the current Council priority. Each designated Academy representative also will be charged with sharing strategies, tools, and ideas from the Academy across his or her respective organization. We will work to enhance and better coordinate our efforts to make our organizations' programs and resources more culturally relevant and useful. Ultimately, we believe Academy participation will improve the collective quality of our existing efforts, strengthen our relationship as a network, create new relationships, and identify further opportunities.

Again, thank you for this opportunity. We look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,



Beth Swedeen



Dan Idzikowski



William MacLean