

GREG J. MILWARD

January 27, 2009

Mr. Thomas Sieger
Ms. Sandra Breitborde
State of Wisconsin, Department of Health Services
1 West Wilson Street
Madison, WI 53702

RE: AIDS Network

Dear Mr. Sieger and Ms. Breitborde:

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to meet with me earlier this month to discuss my ongoing and profound concerns regarding the failures AIDS Network and the role the Wisconsin Department of Health's AIDS/HIV program has played in allowing this to occur. Madison and the thirteen county southern public health region is the least desirable place in Wisconsin to live if you have HIV/AIDS and are in need of the services of an AIDS Service Organization. This is a public embarrassment for the region that includes our state capitol and has jeopardized the health and welfare of those living with HIV/AIDS in the southern public health region of Wisconsin.

The disparity of HIV services between Madison and the rest of Wisconsin is enormous. AIDS Network fails to provide a food pantry, housing assistance, mental health therapy, AODA counseling and treatment and dental care -- all services that the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin provides in Milwaukee, Green Bay and Kenosha and in other locations throughout the state. I can receive far more HIV services in Green Bay than I can in Madison. There is no excuse for Madison to be so underserved by the ASO that the Department of Health Services has officially designated for this region.

As I made clear both in our meeting and in earlier correspondence to Secretary Timberlake, the Ryan White and Mike Johnson Life Care Services grant funds allocated by the Wisconsin Department of Health to AIDS Network should immediately be reallocated to the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin. Unlike AIDS Network, ARCW has been a wise steward of grant funds and has built a sustainable organization that provides superior service to those living in all areas of the state minus the southern public health region.

I wish to memorialize in writing a few points I made in our meeting:

1. The failures that I have brought to your attention are documented and based on objective data and analysis. I have documented the ongoing failure of AIDS Network to provide even the most basic services to those living with HIV/AIDS in a consistent and compassionate manner.

2. The AIDS/HIV Program has historically turned a blind eye to the growing failures of AIDS Network. Having called to the program's attention the many failures of AIDS Network we are now seeing corrective action site visits being done. There are "public" statements being made that funding decisions will not be made until after the February site visit, yet it is clear that the decision to continue funding is preordained through the program's current efforts to broker an ongoing collaborative relationship between AIDS Network and the UW HIV Clinic. If the department is not going to be making a decision regarding funding until after the February site visit the question can rightfully be asked as to why efforts at creating long term collaborations are being carried out by staff of the Wisconsin Department of Health weeks before we have been told that funding decisions are to be made.

As I stated in my meeting with you, there are many within our community who feel as though the AIDS/HIV program's office has become a branch office of AIDS Network and that funding will continue unabated despite objective data that gives ample evidence that the health and welfare of those living with HIV and AIDS is compromised. The brokerage role played by department staff in trying to assist AIDS Network in creating collaborations is yet another example of the lengths they are going to in order to breathe life into a failed agency.

3. The corrective action site visits issued by Dr. James Vergeront use "stern" language in an attempt to convey the impression that the AIDS/HIV program is serious about addressing these issues. As stated above, it was only after I brought forth my concerns regarding AIDS Network that corrective action site visits were issued. The Wisconsin Department of Health, through its AIDS/HIV Program, has for years allowed the continued funding of AIDS Network during a period when all of the issues of incompetence and failure to provide service were clearly in view. To that end, please understand that I fully expect the AIDS/HIV program to inform AIDS Network after the planned February site visit that they have made "tremendous" progress and therefore funding will continue. To expect anything other than this is without merit since past behavior on the part of the Department's AIDS/HIV program is a good indicator of future action. For my part, the results of the February site visit will be a work of fiction and may, at the very least make for interesting reading.

As I stated in our meeting, the fact that the AIDS/HIV program is conducting site visits to address these issues is in itself highly inappropriate. It is the AIDS/HIV program that, along with AIDS Network, allowed these concerns to evolve to this crisis stage. At the very least this gives the appearance of impropriety. An independent audit of AIDS Network would confirm the failure of the agency. Instead, we are being asked to trust the conclusions reached by the AIDS/HIV program despite their complicity in the creation of the very problem they are auditing.

4. In our meeting you made note that the AIDS/HIV Program has stated that many of the problems with AIDS Network were "reporting" in nature and due to software issues. This is simply not the case. While incompetence at the staff level may make use of software a daunting challenge, the documented cases of failure to provide even the most basic of services has nothing to do with software issues. If you would like a copy of my five year analysis of these issues, based on reports received through the Wisconsin Open Records Act, I would be happy to provide you with a copy.

5. AIDS Network has not built a sustainable organization. The loss of one major funding source will cause financial collapse. The Wisconsin Department of Health should not be investing in agencies that are not sustainable for the long term; especially agencies that are charged with providing vital services to those living with HIV/AIDS. ARCW, on the other hand, has built a strong and financially secure agency; one that is sustainable and is poised to provide quality services to those living with HIV/AIDS throughout the state of Wisconsin.
6. Finally, the cost per client allocated with Ryan White and Life Care Services funded for AIDS Network is \$3,139.00 whereas ARCW's cost per client is \$1,499.00. (109% more per client served at AIDS Network) When factoring in all funding sources cost per client at AIDS Network is \$5,749.00 versus the \$3,893.00 per client at ARCW. (47% more per client at AIDS Network) This fact alone is confirmation of my past statements that there has been DHS sanctioned squandering of Ryan White and Life Care Services grants through the continued funding of AIDS Network.

The Department of Health Services through the AIDS/HIV Program has historically been a party in allowing the health and welfare of those living with AIDS in the southern public health region to be jeopardized through the continued funding of and advocacy for AIDS Network. For the status quo to be sanctioned by the Wisconsin Department of Health is simply not an acceptable option.

I thank you again for your involvement in this matter and look forward to the day when service levels in the southern public health region for those living with HIV/AIDS will be commensurate with those provided in the rest of the state of Wisconsin. I look forward to continuing our dialog and to having the opportunity to meet with Secretary Timberlake in the near future to directly discuss my concerns with her.

I look forward to hearing from you as we move forward on this matter and stand ready to provide any additional information or clarification you deem necessary

Sincerely,



Greg J. Milward

C: Senator Jon Erpenbach
Representative Sody Pope-Roberts
Secretary Karen Timberlake
Dr. Seth Foldy