



**Statement of Karen Hayes, Associate Director
Concerned Women for America of Illinois
Given at Illinois Children's Mental Health
Partnership Preliminary Plan Public Forum,
July 23, 2004, Chicago, Illinois**

Concerned Women for America (CWA) is the nation's largest public policy women's organization. CWA of Illinois has reviewed the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership Preliminary Plan and would like to present the following comments and concerns for your consideration.

Until recently, the question of where responsibility lies for raising children has been with parents and, with few exceptions, beyond the parameters of state authority. The United States Supreme Court has clearly upheld parents' rights to direct the health, education and welfare of their children.

Government assistance in the form of various social services has been offered, on a voluntary basis, to families in need over the years. This assistance has been heavily funded by taxpayers and was intended to supplement religious and other private institutional help available to needy families. Sometimes it works; often it doesn't.

The draft government plan before us today, however, goes far beyond any previous statutory role we have seen to date. Proposing that state government set mental health competency standards for all Illinois pregnant women and children to age 18 stuns human sensibilities. Many of us well remember the public outcry and rejection of well-intentioned, but misguided federal government plans for social restructuring such as Goals 2000, school-to-work and universal health care. Now we are being asked to go from outcome based education to outcome based mental health.

We are here reviewing one of the largest recent attempts by the state to subvert, devalue and undermine parental authority in Illinois. "Subvert" sounds harsh, and we recognize that many hours have been spent by many well-meaning people to draft this 26 page plan. No disrespect is meant, but our concerns must be presented. These concerns include, but are not limited to:

- 1) This plan will enormously expand state government. From both social and fiscal points of view, this is a serious concern. Our government bureaucracies continue to

struggle with the job of tending to the social needs of needy Illinois families, and are constantly challenged in their task of trying to educate our children in basic academics. How is it that these same bureaucracies can now be asked to take on the additional role of being the mental health evaluator and caretaker of all pregnant women and children in Illinois?

2) This plan will place another heavy burden on the backs of taxpayers since the state cannot afford to implement it. At a time when budget concerns are on the front pages of most Illinois newspapers, we are being asked to give input to one of the costliest expansions of government and bureaucracy we have seen in recent years.

3) This proposed plan is rife with terms that beg definition. Whose will prevail? How does the government “partner” with anyone—who has the final word on issues of disagreement? Who is “at risk” and who is not? Who determines what information is necessary to be shared and what is not? Who decides what “positive family outcomes” are and are not? Who decides what “meaningful family involvement” is and is not? Who determines what is “culturally relevant”? Which “social emotional screening tools” are the right ones? How will all pregnant women’s and children’s mental health be “assessed”? Why aren’t men being assessed? What are “appropriate confidentiality policies”? Who determines what a child’s “social and emotional” needs are and are not? What do “out of school” programs look like and cost? Who decides what is an “age-appropriate social and emotional competency” for each unique child in Illinois? And what if a child fails someone’s idea of that competency? What is a “non-traditional” organization? What kind of approach is “comprehensive and culturally sensitive”? How will the current controversy over “culturally sensitive” special homosexual rights be addressed? This plan is 26 pages of vague and subjective rhetoric that is the groundwork for citizen indoctrination by more out of control government bureaucracy while creating a special interest group bonanza.

4) There is no accountability attached to this plan whatsoever. Simply put, since social and emotional health is subjective in nature, it is impossible to judge the social and emotional health of the plan itself. We will not know in 10 years whether or not our children have been helped or harmed by such an overreaching state mental health intervention system.

5) This mandatory program challenges the U.S. Supreme Court’s protection of parental authority by usurping parental determinations of their own children’s health, welfare and education. We also find no parental consent provision in the draft proposal of this intrusive program, as required by the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, 20 USC 1232 h. (see attached) It is even unclear as to the exact intent of this proposed plan in relation to God-given and legally-protected parental authority. Phrases like “parental education”, “parent-to-parent advocacy training” and “meaningful family involvement” actually raise the level of our grave concern in this regard. Concerned Women for America of Illinois believes that parents know their children best, and that every child is a uniquely created person with different personalities and talents. To attempt to set social and emotional standards for all children blatantly disregards this fact and will result in social and emotional cookie-cutter children.

6) The plan to assess the mental health of all school-aged children through the Illinois State Board of Education is foolhardy at best, and outrageous beyond that. Only a few short years have passed since Illinois students were subjected to the State Board's "sex questions" on IGAP (now known as ISAT) tests (see attached). Now they are being asked to assess children's attitudes, values and beliefs which are guided by parents, subjective in nature, and which assessment, in fact, is in clear violation of Illinois Public Act 90-0789, which was signed into law by Governor Edgar in 1998 to protect children from the very thing we are here discussing today—a plan to authorize nose questions. And not just authorize, but write them, administer them, grade them, and remediate those who fail them.

As a parent of six children, and having served on the External Review Team for the State Board of Education's academic standards, I am personally and deeply concerned by the thought of the State Board developing and assessing social and emotional competency standards for my children, remembering, for example, that Abraham Lincoln himself got absolutely no mention in their proposed Illinois history standards until concerned parents raised their voices, and then he received only a brief note.

7) The recommendation that the state "ensure that all Illinois school districts develop a policy for incorporating social and emotional development into the district's education program" is unworkable and inappropriate. As a former locally elected school board member, I can assure you from personal experience that local school districts are not equipped or capable to add "mental health provider" to their primary and rightful mission of academically educating our children. This is an assault on elected local control of our community schools and must not be forced down the throats of legitimately elected local school boards in Illinois.

8) Taxpayers generally do not want the government to spend their hard-earned dollars on a public relations campaign to convince them to spend more money on government bureaucracy. The proposed P.R. plan is an offensive idea, and is proof positive of an out of control state government. It is appropriate timing to ask if the governor has read this plan!

9) Expanding the number of Medicaid/KidCare application agents was of special interest to those of us who reviewed this draft document in light of the Operation Push scandal a few years ago. Operation Push reportedly was paid by the state with taxpayer money, exorbitant fees to go find children to enroll in KidCare. The Illinois public was assured at that time that there were scores of uninsured children in Illinois who needed a new taxpayer funded program. Surprisingly, it turned out not to be true. Yet the KidCare program continues to this day. Now, this plan is asking for it to be expanded!

10) Recommending the creation of “incentives that encourage local taxation” is another recommendation that certainly deserves scrutiny. Since when does the state spend taxpayer money to encourage local taxation? Has Mayor Daley read this plan?

11) This proposal calls for collection of mental health data of women and children, together with bureaucratic linkage of this information. I believe it is illegal, according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, for any school records whatsoever to be shared with anyone beyond the student and parents outside of the school.

12) The recommendation to “explore strategies for maximizing the purchase of psychotropic drugs...at discounted prices” seems to give us an incredible look at where this task force thinks Illinois children are headed at a bargain rate.

In summary, it is neither beneficial to children, nor to taxpayers, to ask government bureaucracies to set competency standards for mental health. With some amount of lightheartedness, may I propose that the mental health of the perpetrators of this concept be evaluated?

Thank you.

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