

**STATEMENT BY NASW WI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARC HERSTAND
AT A VIGIL HELD ON NOVEMBER 16, 2009 PROTESTING PROPOSED CUTS TO
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES IN DANE COUNTY**

My name is Marc Herstand. I am a social worker and serve as the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin Chapter. I am speaking at this vigil to urge the Dane County Board of Supervisor to reject the proposed cuts to human services agencies.

Our nation is facing the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Nationally unemployment has reached double digits with the real unemployment rate much higher.

As social workers we know that in times of economic distress, the need for supportive social services grows, whether it is services to homeless families and individuals, to young people at risk, youth who have run away from home, emergency housing, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, or emergency food. We also know that the need for mental health services increases as individuals, couples and families cope with the economic crisis. At the same time as we are all coping with the repercussions of the economic crisis, Veterans are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with major social service and mental health needs.

Unfortunately at a time when we could expect an increasing demand for services, the budget under consideration would actually cut funding for the purchase of service agencies by over 3%. Given the annual cost of living increases faced by these agencies in health care and other expenses, this translates into a much larger cut that could lead to layoffs, increased waiting lists and/or reduction in the number of clients that agencies can serve

As one example the Wisconsin State Journal reported in today's edition that ten mental health service providers expect to lose \$450,000, which may result in more than 20 layoffs affecting as many as 500 clients with a range of mental health problems.

The programs slated to be cut are exactly those programs that work to prevent social problems that are very costly to our county. If you get a young person off the streets into a youth resource center, a neighborhood center or the Boys and Girls Club, you can avoid much more expensive treatment for an alcohol or drug dependency. You can also avoid all the human and societal costs if that young person ended up in the juvenile justice system. If you provide outpatient mental health services in a timely fashion through the Mental Health Center of Dane County, you will avoid expensive institutionalization at Mendota Mental Health center. If you provide respite to an overly stressed family through respite child care or support for a family from the parental stress center, you can avoid serious child abuse, which could lead to removing a child out of a home. If you provide alcohol and drug abuse services in a timely fashion you can avoid all the costs associated with untreated addiction including jail and prison costs, drunk driving, accidents, lost work time etc.

Although child protective services was able to avoid cuts this year through reducing salaries across the board, if you cut those services designed to prevent child abuse and neglect, eventually you will so overburden the child abuse and neglect system that it will be unable to protect children in Dane County. We do not want or need to model the experience of Milwaukee County where 22 children have died in four years due to an overburdened and inefficient system.

As a social worker here in Dane County I call upon Dane County supervisors to reject the cuts in human services.