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February 25, 2003

Aldermen and Alderwomen of Milwaukee
Milwaukee Common Council
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Members of the Common Council:

On February 26, the Committee on Steering and Rules will have an opportunity to vote approval of a Professional Service Agreement between the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) and Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin (PPWI). You should feel confident that this is an important and prudent arrangement.

It is important, first, because it will help save infant lives. Our studies have shown that infant mortality in Milwaukee is associated with a high rate of closely spaced pregnancy. In Milwaukee, *infants born within 18 months of a prior sibling are 3.4 times more likely to die before their first birthdays than those born later.* On Milwaukee's Northwest side, *one sixth of second or higher order births occur within 18 months of a prior birth.* Many of the Northwest side mothers who most need family planning services are already using Women Infant and Child (WIC) Nutrition Program and immunization services at Northwest Health Center (NWHC). Thus locating Title X family planning services at NWHC will effectively reach those most in need.

The urgent need for better access to family planning services is underscored by the finding that *two-thirds of mothers in Milwaukee report their pregnancy is unintended*, compared to one-third in Wisconsin. Unintended pregnancy is associated with increased rates of late prenatal care, low birth weight, and infant mortality.

The proposal is also important because it may *reduce* the number of therapeutic abortions in Milwaukee. Some ill-informed opponents of the proposed agreement argue that it supports abortion services. As you know, *strict guidelines prohibit Title X family planning services from promoting or facilitating abortion.* It should be noted that *Milwaukee women now undergo therapeutic abortion at twice the rate of Wisconsin women.* Given that Milwaukee also suffers twice the rate of unintended pregnancy, quality, accessible family planning services are more likely to reduce the number of abortions than increase them.

About one of every ten teen girls (under age 18) deliver infants each year in five of the six zip codes surrounding Northwest Health Center. More alarming - in Milwaukee, *almost a third of teen*

pregnancies are delivered to teens who are already mothers, a clear indicator that past strategies to serve these teens have not been very effective. (In this statistic teens were women under age 20). Again, many of these teens are already visiting NWHC for infant-related services, and would benefit greatly from family planning services.

PPWI will not just offer comprehensive family planning services (including non-contraceptive methods for those who desire them). Comprehensive services at the site will also include screening for cervical cancer. Age adjusted cancer death rates are twice as high African-American women as white women in Milwaukee, in part due to a lack of screenings.

Finally, over 12,000 cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are diagnosed annually in our city. All patients visiting PPWI are screened and treated for STIs by protocols approved by the Health Department. The new PPWI site will expand the network of clinics providing this critical disease control service (for men, as well as women). Not only can STIs cause infertility, life-threatening ectopic pregnancy, and birth defects, they contribute to the transmission of AIDS. In Wisconsin in 2000, new African-American AIDS cases exceeded cases in whites for the first time, and in the same year the number of new HIV infections in Milwaukee County rose for the first time since 1997. PPWI services can help us counter this disturbing trend.

Many council members have acknowledged these important health reasons for expanding services at Northwest Health Center. They ask, however, if these services could not be provided by MHD personnel, or by other agencies. There are several reasons PPWI can perform these services when others cannot.

The first is because PPWI is the sole agency in Milwaukee County eligible to receive Federal Title X family planning funds. These funds permit PPWI to see patients regardless of their insurance status or their ability to pay. The same funds allow PPWI to assist MHD with necessary clinic modifications at NWHC that will benefit all of our patients. (No other provider has found such an arrangement financially viable without being subsidized by the city. MHD does use grant or tax funds to support other care provider programs (for example, BESTD clinic, 16th Street Community Health Center and Milwaukee Health Services). In this case, PPWI can assume the entire cost for their services.)

Second, while PPWI staff performs these reproductive health services, public health nurses will continue serving patients in homes, day-care centers, clinics and schools. In the current nursing shortage, it would be impossible for MHD staff to offer expanded reproductive health services without reducing other vital services.

Finally, most of the services offered by PPWI require nurse practitioners, as well as a tightly-coupled referral system for advanced follow-up care (such as colposcopy for abnormal Pap tests). These are well beyond the current means of the Health Department.

Thus, by this arrangement (and no other), city taxpayers will have expanded and more convenient access to services, while *tax levy costs for operating NWHC will be reduced*, not increased.

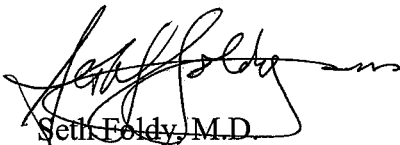
Finally, some have asked why it is necessary for PPWI to locate their services inside Northwest Health Center. While it is indeed possible for them to locate elsewhere, at NWHC our patients who most need their services will access them in a convenient, one-stop-shop setting. We know from past experience

that forcing low-income working women to travel on buses with their children to a remote clinic is almost the same as denying care. Also, many clients who come to NWHC for PPWI services will benefit from our services as well. Our nutrition, immunization, parenting teaching, and well-child supervision services will become more conveniently available to a larger population, and save more infant lives.

Finally, you may be interested to learn what communications the Health Department has received from the public regarding this proposal. In addition to a strong letter of support from the Milwaukee state legislature delegation, the department has received 125 letters, emails or calls from persons in support of this proposal, of whom 75 lived inside the City of Milwaukee and 50 in surrounding suburbs. We have received 11 communications in opposition, of whom five live in the City, five in surrounding suburbs and two out of state.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this proposal. I think you will see that Milwaukee wins from both a health standpoint and a fiscal standpoint.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seth Foldy", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Seth Foldy, M.D.
Commissioner of Health

CC: Mayor John Norquist