



555 West Washington Ave, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703

www.wccf.org
608-284-0580
608-284-0583

Date: June 8, 2009
To: Members of the Wisconsin Legislature
From: Charity Eleson, Executive Director
Re: AB75 Biennial Budget Bill

Officers

President

Marcia Engen, Appleton

Vice President

Joy Tapper, Wauwatosa

Secretary

Steve I. Klaven, Madison

Treasurer

Steve Kinkade, Beloit

Board Members

Nancy Armbrust, Green Bay

Jacquelyn Boggess, Madison

Tonya L. Brito, Madison

Luis A. Garza, Caledonia

Mary Haffenbredl, Madison

Nancy Heykes, Appleton

Donna V. Hurd, Madison

Missy J. MacLeod, Milwaukee

Donald Maurer, Waukesha

Harry Ogden, Madison

Donald Ott, Pewaukee

William Perloff, Baileys Harbor

Jo Anne Sturiale, Fitchburg

Sandi Tunis, Milwaukee

Joseph R. Wall, Milwaukee

Richard L. Withers, Milwaukee

Administration

Executive Director

Charity Eleson, Madison

Deputy Director

Jim Moeser, Madison

On behalf of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), I would like to express our appreciation for the efforts made thus far in the budget process to maintain safety net and other critical services that benefit children and families in the budget passed by the Joint Finance Committee. Notably, the decisions made to partially restore the cut in Youth Aids, to preserve BadgerCare Plus, to improve the W-2 program and to eliminate provisions in the Wisconsin Shares child care tuition assistance program that would have limited the availability of that benefit for the families it serves are all actions that we appreciate and that we know will benefit children and their families. We also appreciate the inclusion of a number of progressive tax policy changes that made it possible to avoid even deeper cuts in critical services at a time in which an increasing number of families must turn to public services to help meet the basic needs of their households.

That said, there were also some opportunities that we believe have been missed thus far in this budget process and that we would like to encourage you to consider in the days ahead as you complete your deliberations on the budget.

WCCF joined many other organizations in supporting the use of new federal stimulus dollars to make a modest but important investment in creating a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The creation of a QRIS was a small, but significant first step for the state to take toward creating a system that more effectively uses the substantial annual investment in the Wisconsin Shares program to create a high quality early childhood system in Wisconsin. We have worked persistently over the course of the past five years to call for changes that will lead to a high quality early childhood system because of the robust body of research that demonstrates the important role that high quality early childhood programs have in helping close the achievement gap and improve life-long outcomes for low income

children. Wisconsin has one of the most significant achievement gaps for children of color of any state in the nation, and we are wasting the tremendous potential of thousands of children by not working cohesively and effectively to close this gap. There is so much more that we need to do to help every child in Wisconsin achieve to his or her highest ability, and we will continue to ask for your support and leadership to accomplish that critical goal.

A second opportunity that we believe was missed in this budget was the decision to not move forward with a plan to change the age of jurisdiction for 17 year olds. We had offered a workable, viable option to set Wisconsin on the path toward that goal by asking for the creation of an implementation committee that would work on a plan to put this change into effect in 2012. We understood that there were concerns about the funding needed for the change in the age of jurisdiction, which is why we offered this pragmatic solution for consideration. The current treatment of all 17 year olds, regardless of their crime, as adults is simply ineffective and bad policy. It produces poor results for the youth it affects and produces higher public costs associated with those poor results over time. Again, we will continue to ask for your support and leadership to accomplish this critical goal.

Finally, we are very concerned about the cumulative effect of decisions made by JFC to address the additional \$1.6 billion shortfall that needed to be addressed after the budget had already been introduced. As you know, we joined many other groups across the state that strongly encouraged the Legislature and the Governor to consider a more balanced approach to addressing the additional deficit with consideration of some additional progressive changes in tax policy. In our analysis of the JFC budget, we find cuts of almost \$944 million over the biennium, \$251 million of which are across the board cuts to state agencies without any information on how those cuts will be handled. While this was an expedient way to handle a significant decision to cut spending, it prevented public review and comment on how those cuts would be addressed.

We know how difficult this budget process has been for many of you and the hard decisions you've had to make. We appreciate your public service in this process and your efforts to balance many competing priorities. We look forward to continuing to work with you on the issues I've highlighted here and others in the remainder of the legislative session.

We are nearing the completion of our analysis of the JFC budget changes. We expect to have it posted early this week on our website at www.wccf.org