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**New WCCF Report Shows Unemployment Program In Need of an Update**  
“Making UI Work for Families” Suggests Improvements to Accommodate Changing Workforce

Wisconsin’s Unemployment Insurance (UI) program must be adjusted to accommodate changes in the composition of the state’s workforce, according to a new publication from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). “Making UI Work for Families,” the first in a series of 2004 WISKIDS Count reports highlights the mismatch between the new face of Wisconsin’s workforce—of which part-time workers and single parents make up a growing share—and a program that was designed primarily to accommodate the old-fashioned household headed by a full-time breadwinning father and stay-at-home mother.

“The way Wisconsin’s UI program is currently set up, the most vulnerable workers are often the least likely to qualify for unemployment benefits when they lose their jobs,” said WCCF Executive Director Charity Eleson. “These workers and their kids are being penalized by an archaic system. We need a UI program that recognizes the key role part-time and irregular shift workers now play in our economy.”

In Wisconsin, a person must be actively seeking and available for full-time, first-shift work in order to qualify for UI. WCCF recommends: (1) changing UI law to require that workers be available to work 20 hours per week instead of the current 35; and (2) eliminating the requirement that workers be available for first shift work.

The report notes that mothers represent the fastest growing segment of the workforce. In Wisconsin, 79 percent of women with children under 18 are engaged in the labor market. However, a significant percentage of them are engaged in non-standard—i.e. part-time or temporary—employment. Nearly half of the women working part-time in Wisconsin cite child care and other family considerations as their reason for working part-time. Under current law, people seeking only part-time employment do not qualify for UI. Twenty-four states now make some provision for unemployment insurance for part-time workers, and nine of those states have “part-time parity” policies that treat part-time workers just like full-time workers.

“Current UI rules put many parents in an impossible situation,” Eleson said. “Family obligations prevent them from working full-time. But if they lose their part-time job, the system does not provide benefits to tide them over while they look for another part-time job. There’s no recognition of the fine balance between the family’s social needs and its economic needs. Low-income families with children are being hurt the most by these policies. Those are precisely the kids we can least afford to let fall through the holes in the safety net.”

The paper is available online at <http://www.wccf.org/pdf/workingpoorUIfinal.pdf>.