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## **Report by WPRI Grossly Misrepresents Facts on Education and Training Within the “Wisconsin Works” Program**

**Madison** – A report released today by the Wisconsin Policy and Research Institute titled “Road to Nowhere: Education and Training Under Wisconsin Works” makes critical assessments of W-2 education and training components; the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families responds.

“This report grossly exaggerates the investment the W-2 program makes in education and training activities,” responded Charity Eleson, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “The Legislative Audit Bureau published a factual and well-researched report earlier this month that the WPRI authors would have been well-advised to review prior to the release of their report.”

John Keckhaver, Research Analyst at the Council, added, “In Wisconsin there is a decided ‘work-first’ philosophy. W-2 is known around the country as a program in which participants are put into work as quickly as possible, without focusing on building skills and gaining educational credentials. W-2 doesn’t focus enough on job skills and useful educational services, which explains why the results the program produces, according to the Legislative Audit Bureau report, leave the vast majority of W-2 participants who get jobs living in poverty.”

For example, according to the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB):

- Approximately 20 percent of former participants earned more than the poverty level in the year they left W-2, while the majority did not.
- Between September 1997 and June 2004, only 4.9 percent of total spending for W-2 contracts was for educational activities and skills training.
- Only a very small portion of W-2 participants has received training for specific job skills development. In 2004, 6.8 percent of participants received job skills training, and 1.9 percent took part in technical college course trainings.
- About one third of W-2 participants in 2004 received basic remedial education, including just 0.9 percent who received high school equivalency services and 32.3 percent who received adult basic education services.

What’s more, the percentage of those receiving job skills training has actually shrunk considerably in recent years, from 19.7 percent in 2002 to 6.8 percent in 2004.

“There are clearly shortcomings within the W-2 program, and the LAB report has highlighted that,” stated Eleson. “But of all the shortcomings the program has, one of them is not that there is a surplus of expenditures and attention paid to education and job skills training. In fact, these results should prompt quick and immediate action from state policy makers to make changes in the program to provide expanded vocational and job skills training that can ensure better results and self-sufficiency for families. That is, after all, the goal of the W-2 program.”

The LAB report also found that:

- 80 percent of participants were at or below the poverty level in the year after they left W-2, based on their wages.
- Only 42 percent of those who left W-2 in 1999 earned more than the poverty level in 2003, after the inclusion of several tax credits.
- Returning participants increased from 38.6 percent of all subsidized placements in June 2000 to 52.3 percent in June 2004. (A returning participant is one who had previously left W-2 for at least two months and then subsequently returned to a subsidized placement.)

“W-2 may not be working to help people gain self-sufficiency, but that has nothing to do with offering too much in basic skills training, GED preparation, high school diploma completion or job skills training – as the Wisconsin Research Policy Institute would have you believe -- because those services are seldom being offered,” added Bob Andersen, Staff Attorney for WCCF.

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