



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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WCCF Applauds Gov. Doyle's New Budget Proposal, Encourages Legislators to Vote for Passage

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families today supported the compromise budget proposed by Gov. Doyle, and encouraged legislators to vote for its passage.

“This proposal represents a balanced package that accomplishes the difficult task of prioritizing the most critical needs of children and families while at the same time protecting the interests of the state’s taxpayers,” said WCCF Executive Director Charity Eleson. “We urge members of the State Legislature to accept this package and bring this impasse to an end.”

WCCF specifically endorsed a number of items in the bill, including the following:

Early Education

- Ensures that working parents can afford to place their children in safe, adult-supervised settings while they are at work by providing a \$69 million increase in funding for the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program.
- Provides \$3 million to help school districts cover the costs of starting up 4-year-old kindergarten (4K) programs, particularly approaches to 4K that foster collaboration between public schools and other early childhood education providers.

Health Care

- Expands BadgerCare to include all children, as well as pregnant women up to 300 percent of the poverty level.
- Expands the Family Care Program, which provides long-term care services to the elderly and people with disabilities.

Workforce Development

- \$1.4 million to provide W-2 cash assistance to unmarried pregnant women in the third trimester of at-risk pregnancies.
- Creates a new Department of Children and Families into which a variety of programs serving children and families—including W-2, child care, child welfare and child support—would be consolidated.

- Establishes a pilot Trial Jobs (Real Work, Real Pay) program within W-2, which would provide participants with authentic work experience in the labor market and potentially make them eligible for the earned income tax credits.

K-12 Education

- A \$235 million increase in equalization aid funding.
- \$26.8 million in additional funding for the SAGE program, which helps reduce class sizes in the lower grades in schools with high percentages of low-income students.
- An additional \$3.3 million for the School Breakfast program.

Taxes

- Increases the cigarette tax by \$1.25 per pack.
- Implements a hospital assessment that should draw down \$400 million in federal funds in order to increase MA reimbursement rates.

Child Welfare

- Provides over \$1.7 million GPR to increase payments to foster families for basic expenses, such as food and clothing.

Justice

- Increases Youth Aids funding to counties by \$23 million to offset the increased cost of placement in juvenile correctional institutions.
- Provides funding for civil legal services to indigent people on certain issues, including guardian ad litem and obtaining child support.

Eleson noted that the proposal, while representing a fair compromise, is far from ideal. “We recognize that passing a budget is a give-and-take process,” she said. “Nobody gets everything they want. This proposal is not perfect, but it is a budget we can support, and we believe that in the spirit of compromise, others should support it as well.”

Items about which WCCF expressed disappointment include these:

- While BadgerCare Plus Phase II expands health care access to childless adults below 200 percent of poverty, no funding for this expansion is provided in the bill.
- Funding for the Homestead Tax Credit will decrease by \$12.7 in comparison to base funding levels due to continued erosion from inflation. Indexing the credit for inflation could have halted this erosion.
- Freezing shared revenue payments to local governments.
- Creation of a “job ready” category in W-2, offering no cash assistance.

“While there are some features of the proposal we are not entirely happy with, our work does not end with the passage of a budget,” Eleson said. “Each budget merely represents a new starting

point. We will continue to advocate for the best possible policies for the state's kids and their families.”

For a more detailed analysis of budget issues, visit the WCCF website at <http://www.wccf.org>.

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