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Assembly Republican Budget Package Hurts Kids and Families

Across the Board Cuts to Education, Health Care, Working Family Support, Increase in Taxes for Low-Income Families

Madison - The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) expressed strong opposition today to portions of the Assembly Republican budget package that will harm opportunity for health, employment and property tax relief of thousands of Wisconsin families.

The Assembly Republican version of the state budget released Monday represents a significant set-back for children and families in Wisconsin. The proposal almost universally cuts funding or eliminates programs that directly impact children in the state and creates unnecessary red tape for families who apply for assistance. Particularly hard hit in this budget are low-income working families.

“It is in the best interest of all Wisconsinites to create opportunities for all families in our state to succeed. This budget package creates numerous barriers to families seeking to get ahead” said Charity Eleson, WCCF executive director. “The people of Wisconsin value education, opportunity, health care, and local government services such as police and fire, and this budget falls short of reflecting those values at all.”

The Assembly Republican package eliminates the BadgerCare Plus program, which would expand health insurance to nearly every child in our state, as well as many farm families and pregnant women. Their budget plan retains \$23 million in cost-saving measures proposed by the Governor to finance improved access to health care, but the new plan deletes all of the access improvements those funds would have paid for.

“Wisconsin has an opportunity to be a national leader by covering all kids. That is not only the right choice for Wisconsin, it is also a good investment for our state. Regardless of how legislators feel about broader health care plans, they should at least support expansion of coverage to every child in our state,” Eleson said.

Despite strong bi-partisan support in the Joint Finance Committee, Assembly Republicans reversed course on the child care subsidy program, creating waiting lists, increasing parent co-payments and imposing a time limit for participation.

“In Wisconsin we have a strong work ethic, and the Wisconsin Shares program reflects that value. If parents cannot pay for child care, they cannot go to work. Because it reverses a bi-partisan compromise in the Joint Finance Committee this action is very disappointing, particularly for low-income families who are trying to keep jobs and have a safe and nurturing place for their children while they work,” said Eleson.

The Homestead Tax Credit has provided property tax relief to low-income families and seniors since 1974, and it currently benefits about 240,000 households each year. In an unprecedented move, the Assembly Republicans chose to eliminate Homestead Credit eligibility for all Wisconsin citizens but seniors.

“Ending the Homestead Credit for most current recipients amounts to a \$106 million property tax increase for low-income families living in every community in our state,” Eleson stated.

In addition, the new budget proposal deletes the \$26.8 million increase in Youth Aids, but retains the 24 percent increase in the juvenile corrections daily rate, which the Youth Aids increase was to offset. Under this proposal, counties will have a significantly higher cost for corrections and will have less money to spend on crime prevention and other services for juveniles.

“Providing prevention services is the best way to keep our kids and communities safe. By reducing funding and increasing corrections costs we are limiting opportunities for successful intervention.” Eleson said.

The Assembly budget includes an amendment to the W2 program responding to a recent appeals court ruling. “The recent court decision deserves a Legislative response that is thoroughly vetted, and is introduced and discussed through stand alone legislation,” Eleson concluded.

Some of the other items of concern proposed by the Assembly Republicans include measures that would:

- Cut more than \$85 million from general school aid;
- Cut funding for child support enforcement;
- Eliminate the Real Work, Real Pay pilot program;
- Delete increases to Wisconsin Higher Education Grants;
- Eliminate \$3.3 million for school breakfasts;
- Delete start-up grants for four-year-old kindergarten programs;
- Eliminate \$3 million in Emergency Assistance for housing;
- Require fees from individuals taking classes to learn English (currently free);
- Delete \$1.6 million the Youth Apprenticeship technical training program;
- Eliminate eligibility for low-cost family planning services for 15-17 year olds;
- Eliminate the cigarette tax increase; and
- Create a new requirement of documentary proof of citizenship or legal status for applicants for necessary benefits and services, regardless of whether or not they were born in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a multi-issue statewide, non-profit, non-partisan organization. www.wccf.org

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