



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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WCCF Responds to Governor's Budget

(Madison)--The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) commends Governor Doyle for taking a balanced approach to the state budget. In his budget proposal unveiled Tuesday evening, Governor Doyle demonstrated a commitment to protecting many of the state functions that vulnerable families and children rely on most, while showing a willingness to find new sources of revenue to pay for these important budget items. The Governor's budget represents a prudent approach that reduces the structural deficit and, barring unforeseen developments, would leave the state with a modest surplus at the end of the biennium. While significant cuts were unavoidable, this proposal avoids even deeper cuts by closing a number of corporate tax loopholes and identifying several other sensible improvements to our tax system.

"We understand the magnitude of the state's fiscal crisis, and are pleased that the Governor has come up with a budget that will not be devastating for vulnerable kids and their families," said WCCF Executive Director Charity Eleson. "Governor Doyle showed leadership in raising revenue to preserve Wisconsin's commitment in key areas such as health care and education. We appreciate his understanding of the fact that we need a balanced approach to fixing the state budget. We can't balance the budget through cuts alone without seriously impairing the very things that make Wisconsin a great place to live, work and raise a family."

The Council looks forward to working with the State Legislature to identify additional strategies for increasing state revenue in order to further cushion the blow the economic downturn has delivered to struggling families.

"While not an area of policy that we actively follow, we were also pleased with the Governor's efforts to tame the rapidly rising cost of incarcerating adults through changes in policies that we hope will result in better cost controls and better outcomes for the state," said Eleson.

In the coming weeks, WCCF will be analyzing the Governor's budget in greater detail. WCCF's analysis will be available on our website, <http://www.wccf.org>, and updates will be available on WCCF's new blog, <http://wiskids.blogspot.com>. Below are WCCF's initial impressions of the budget's impact in key areas:

Health Care

The Governor's budget preserves the progress we have made toward ensuring that all kids in the state have access to health care coverage. Wisconsin has long been a national leader on health care. We are within striking distance of finishing the job of covering all kids, and this budget helps sustain our momentum toward that goal.

Early Care and Education

WCCF applauds the Governor's ongoing support of the Wisconsin Shares subsidy program as we work to iron out problems that have been identified in the program. We are concerned, however, about proposed increases in parent copays and the possible implementation of waiting lists, both of which would be harmful to some of the state's most vulnerable families.

The Council believes that the Governor's quality rating system is an important first step toward creating a high quality early care and education system. The Council looks forward to learning more detail about the Governor's initiatives to improve the quality of early care and education across the state, and will be urging the Legislature to continue to improve the state's commitment to quality improvement. We are also pleased to see investment in start-up grants for 4-year-old kindergarten.

Economic Support and Workforce Development

The Council welcomes a number of improvements to the W-2 program, including the elimination of time limits for participation in individual placements within the program, and expanded eligibility for women in at-risk pregnancies and parents of newborn infants. The Council also endorses the much-needed increase in funding for emergency assistance, an obvious area of need with evictions and foreclosures skyrocketing.

While the Governor's budget signals a strong commitment to education, there is a very limited increase in financial aid for technical college and no initiatives specifically targeted to vocational training for low-skilled, low-income workers. This comes at a time when demand for technical college services is growing briskly, and the need for occupational retraining is great.

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

WCCF is pleased to see improvements in child welfare, such as an increase in foster care rates and increases in funding for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. However, the budget also includes reductions in IV-E funding, which the 71 counties outside of Milwaukee have used for prevention of abuse and neglect.