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## WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ROASTS AND TOASTS 2003-2005 BIENNIAL BUDGET PASSED BY LEGISLATURE TODAY

Madison, WI---In response to final action taken today by the Wisconsin Legislature on the 2003-2005 biennial budget, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) found things to praise and things to criticize.

“Given the fiscal obstacles that the Governor and the Legislature were up against, we’re pleased that this budget protected some of the most fundamental safety net services,” said WCCF Executive Director Anne Arnesen. “A number of other states around the nation who were also facing severe budget deficits did not make similar choices.”

Both Governor Doyle and the Legislature preserved current eligibility criteria and services that low-income families and their children receive under the state’s two medical care programs, Medicaid and BadgerCare, which the Council considers crucial to the health and well-being of Wisconsin’s families and children.

Additionally, both the Governor and the Legislature preserved Community Aids and Youth Aids, which fund child protection services and rehabilitation services to juveniles who have been adjudicated delinquent. The Governor and the Legislature also preserved emergency assistance to homeless families and boosted funds for W-2 benefits and Wisconsin Shares to reflect growing caseloads.

“All that is good news, but other budget provisions that freeze property taxes, reduce funding for four-year-old kindergarten and reduce local revenues for school districts could spell trouble for local services that benefit children and families,” said Arnesen.

In the final days of Joint Finance action, the Joint Finance Committee included policy provisions in the budget that freeze levy growth for three years for counties and municipalities, with the exception of growth in levy stemming from new construction.

The Committee also reduced funding for four-year-old kindergarten and reduced revenue caps for school districts, which are likely to reduce the number of schools that offer four-year-old kindergarten. There are currently just over 16,000 students who participate in four-year-old kindergarten around the state. The Legislature ratified these provisions in their final vote today.

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“These were huge changes at the last minute that will affect every community in the state,” said Arnesen. “Yet, there was no opportunity before the Committee made its final decisions for more comprehensive public review and comment on the effect these changes will have on local communities. This is not the way we ought to be running state government.”

For more information on the budget’s impact on programs that benefit children and families, see WCCF’s analysis at [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org).