

Governor Walker & Wisconsin State Legislators,

As organizations that work every day with and on behalf of Wisconsin's most vulnerable individuals, we have come together to voice our concerns about most of the bills in the Governor's special legislative session on welfare reform.

We share the goal of helping people find and maintain family-supporting jobs, and we share the goal of breaking down the barriers that all too often stand between individuals and sustainable, good jobs.

But many of these bills will not accomplish those shared goals. These bills will instead significantly increase administrative costs and barriers to needed assistance for struggling families. And even when exemptions are considered, research has found that disproportionately many people hurt by work requirements in programs like FoodShare are in fact people with disabilities, health conditions, and caregivers. These proposals have the potential to deprive vulnerable families and children of the most essential basic needs – food, healthcare and shelter.

These harsh measures do not reflect our Wisconsin values and will put the health and safety of our community members at risk.

We support proven, effective solutions to help individuals and families escape poverty, not costly, unproven, punitive, ineffective measures.

A package of bills that truly reflects what is both effective and needed to assist Wisconsin's vulnerable individuals and families would:

- 1) Address the tremendous transportation barriers facing low-income workers and their families statewide, including lack of access to reliable vehicles and suspensions of driver's licenses due to poverty;
- 2) Expand access to meaningful jobs skills training and educational opportunities through our excellent Wisconsin technical college system;
- 3) Ensure adequate funding for child care assistance, and ensure child care availability that meets the often erratic schedules of the low-wage workplace;
- 4) Raise Wisconsin's minimum wage so that no one working in our state still lives in poverty; and
- 5) Recognize and address the unique situations and barriers to employment facing unpaid caregivers, survivors of violence, people with disabilities, and other particularly vulnerable populations.

We ask Wisconsin's legislators to:

- Set aside these bills and invest in solutions that work; proven, effective solutions that will create paths out of poverty, not costly administrative and bureaucratic hurdles that harm vulnerable families who are trying to make ends meet; and
- Hold public hearings on these issues throughout the state at times and places when people who rely on these programs and who are trying to get out of poverty can provide real input. Just as legislators have ideas about how to make Medicaid, FoodShare, and Wisconsin Shares more effective, our neighbors and fellow community members who use these programs during hard times also have ideas for what they need to escape poverty. Those stakeholders should be at the table before further reforms are deliberated in the Capitol.

We stand ready to partner with legislators to craft proposals that will truly address barriers to work and lead to stable employment and paths out of poverty.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Wisconsin
Advocates of Ozaukee
The Arc Wisconsin
Association for Prevention of Family Violence (APFV)
AVAIL Inc.
Beloit Domestic Violence Survivor Center
The Bridge to Hope
Community Advocates Public Policy Institute
Community Referral Agency
Congregations United to Serve Humanity (CUSH)
Disability Rights Wisconsin
Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS)
End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin
Fair Wisconsin
Family Advocates, Inc.
Family Voices of Wisconsin
Feeding Wisconsin
Forward Kenosha
Green Haven
Harbor House
HELP of Door County
Hunger Relief Federation
Hunger Task Force
In Courage
JOSHUA

Kids Forward
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin
Madison-area Urban Ministry
Mental Health America of Wisconsin
Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth
Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force
Milwaukee Shelter and Transitional Housing Task Force
MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equality and Solidarity)
NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin
National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin
Oakwood Haven Domestic Abuse/Sexual Assault Shelter
PAVE People Against Domestic and Sexual Abuse (PADA)
Racine Interfaith Coalition (RIC)
Safe Harbor of Sheboygan
Sharing Center, Inc.
Society of St. Vincent de Paul - Madison
Society of St. Vincent de Paul - St. Matthias Conference
SOPHIA of Waukesha County
Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations
Today Not Tomorrow - Project Babies
Tri-County Council
Turningpoint
Violence Intervention Project, Inc.
Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA)
Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP)
Wisconsin Community Services
Wisconsin Council of Churches
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
WISDOM
The Women's Community
Women's Resource Center of Racine
Worker Justice Wisconsin
YWCA Madison
9to5 Wisconsin

We Stand Together

