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EDUCATION NETWORK**

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To: Assembly Committee on Labor and Workforce Development

Re: Opposition to AB 286

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has consistently opposed legislation that unfairly denies work opportunities for ex-offenders from the criminal justice system. The current and long-standing Fair Employment law provision, which allows denial of employment if the circumstances of a conviction relate to the circumstances of the job, properly addresses the concerns of businesses and organizations.

The proposed legislation, AB 286, reverses Fair Employment practices and gives blanket permission to reject or to terminate employment of any individual who has been convicted of a felony and has not been pardoned. Keep in mind that the current law does not require an employer to hire a person with a conviction. That protection already exists. So it is some concern to us as to the actual purpose of this legislation.

For over a decade and continuing in this session, legislators in the State of Wisconsin have continued to create and reclassify a significant number of felonies. Since there are a miniscule number of pardons issued to ex-offenders we believe it is necessary to raise questions regarding undesirable and unintended consequences from this bill.

What effect will this new barrier to employment have on families of ex-offenders in light of the increasing rate of child poverty in this state? Will this be used to arbitrarily deny work opportunities for ex-offenders whose felonies were well in the past? Is there any protection from arbitrary termination for an employed ex-offender with satisfactory work performance?

It is important to remember that the ability of ex-offenders to responsibly re-enter society through adequate employment opportunities greatly lessens the incidence of recidivism and its high cost to the public. If we continue to deny opportunities for employment to felons and other offenders there can be no meaningful re-integration into ordinary society. This has a direct bearing on the Corrections budget in our state. Legislation such as this ensures that the public will continue to bear those onerous costs.

The goal of appropriate public policy is to benefit the broadest reaches of society and not just a select few. For these reasons the League of Women Voters opposes AB286.

Thank you for considering our comments on this important matter.