



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

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To: Joint Committee on Finance

Re: Statement on 2007-2009 State Budget – Children and Families

The League appreciates Governor Doyle's efforts to include an increase in funding of Wisconsin Works considering the many financial challenges the Doyle Administration faced in developing the budget, including TANF block grants reductions. However, we would be remiss if we did not address the recommended Wisconsin Shares cost-saving measures. These measures will undermine the integrity of the program and the goal of W-2 to move families out of poverty: 1) lower eligibility levels, 2) increase co-payments by 10%, 3) authorizes waiting lists when needed, and 4) freeze payment rates to providers at the 2006 level.

While the W-2 program has greatly reduced the number of people on its rolls, it has been a failure in meeting the goal of reducing the number of people in poverty. The League urges the legislature to continue to provide the supports needed by poor Wisconsin families. We support the increase in emergency assistance of \$4 million, although this is not nearly enough.

Some years ago, the legislature diverted TANF funds to replace General Purpose Revenue, which had been used to fund the Earned Income Tax Credit, and freeing up GPR for other uses. We strongly support restoring the TANF grant for services to poor families and returning that amount of the funding of the EITC to the GPR.

We applaud the inclusion of the Transitional Jobs Pilot Program in the budget. TANF recipients have a large number of barriers to work and the transitional job allows them to build job experience while working to overcome those barriers. We have pleaded before to increase the educational opportunities for TANF participants. Currently they are required to be working half time and be enrolled in classes half time. With family responsibilities, this becomes virtually impossible for poor families. Many recipients need basic education before they can find low-wage jobs. There is a growing demand for skill workers in the state. By allowing them to go less than 1/2 time and fostering movement into higher level courses in specific occupations and industries, they will not only be able to earn higher wages and move out of poverty, but they will help to fill the growing shortage of skilled workers.

The League also acknowledges and supports other programs and initiatives included in the budget that will benefit our youngest citizens and their caretakers and asks that you give them careful consideration. Research is proving the economic and social benefits to our society of early prevention and intervention far outweigh the costs.

The League supports:

1. The creation of the Department of Children and Families.
2. Funding to support a new Home Visiting Program, which will be universal, and increased funding for the current program that provides targeted home visiting services for first time medical assistance-eligible parents with identified risk factors for child abuse and neglect,

3. Funding to implement a quality day care rating system; increased funding for child care and education providers' scholarships; and funding for start-up grants in the first and second year that a district offers a 4-K program. (All are part of the Governor's Quality Care for Quality Kids initiative.)
4. Funding to continue the Allied Drive Initiative in the City of Madison to provide home visiting and employment preparation and support for low-income families, and additional funding to expand the program within Dane County. (This will be a model program which then can be adopted throughout the state.)
5. Funding to extend the amount of time an eligible custodial parent of an infant may receive a monthly W-2 grant from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. (This change will actually save W-2 funds.)
6. The creation and funding of an "affordable housing trust fund."