



**LUTHERAN
OFFICE
FOR PUBLIC
POLICY**
in Wisconsin

Wisconsin State Budget 2021-23

Comment on the Budget [Here](#)

Our Priorities

1. Hunger, Poverty, & Health Intersections (including trauma from sex trafficking)
2. Care for God's Creation
3. Juvenile Justice
4. Immigration

Hunger and Poverty

Accept Federal Dollars to Expand Badger Care - Wisconsin's Medicaid Program

We lose about \$180 million per year by not accepting federal dollars for Wisconsin's Medicaid program, Badger Care. Funding for Badger Care also intersects with priorities related to hunger and poverty and an array of other issues. Examples of benefits:

(1) Expanding coverage to 138% of the poverty levels means that people in low wage jobs wouldn't fear losing their Badger Care by accepting a position where they'd make slightly more per hour. (2) A family of four with an income of \$36,570 would have health insurance. (3) More funding available for the treatment of victims of sex trafficking.

- An additional 90,000 people could be covered under Badger Care if Wisconsin accepts full expansion.
- Additional match money could be obtained to fund additional health services such as mental health services. This would include services to individuals who have been deeply traumatized due to being victims of sex trafficking and other forms of abuse.
- This is not welfare. All but 12 states have accepted Medicare expansion. It is making health care available to many people who currently are uninsured or underinsured.
- "The COVID-19 pandemic has only further highlighted our urgent need for affordable, accessible healthcare.

Notes: Thank you to AARP for three of the bullet points. A [helpful article](#) from 2019. LOPPW has been working on this very significant budgetary issue since 2015.

Support Wisconsin Farmers

- FoodShare is Wisconsin's largest anti-hunger program. Investing in EBT technology supports local farmers and creates an avenue for fresh produce for low-income families.
- Providing \$187,500 annually to supply EBT processing equipment to farmers' markets and direct marketing farmers will help markets overcome barriers to accepting FoodShare purchases.
- Farmers markets provide a vital role of connecting Wisconsinites to fresh, locally grown produce. As of April 2021, only 53 farmers markets were approved to accept FoodShare in Wisconsin.

Note: Thank you to Feeding Wisconsin for these talking points.

Eliminate Barriers to Receiving FoodShare, Employment, & Training

- Drug testing should not be a condition to getting food assistance.
- Those who find themselves in need of public assistance, and those - whatever their economic and social situation - who suffer from addiction are our neighbors, friends, family members, and fellow worshippers.
- Our faith communities have extensive experience in supporting and operating programs that serve persons in need, including those with drug abuse problems. We know how long the road to recovery can be, and how many ups and downs, reversals, and new beginnings typically occur along the way.
- Drug testing prevents eligible families from seeking public assistance because they are deterred by the stigma of taking a drug test.
- Repeal the requirement that OHS implement drug screening and testing for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents participating in FoodShare Employment & Training.

Note: Thank you to Feeding Wisconsin for three of these talking points. [Letter about drug testing](#) written by faith leaders, including LOPPW, in 2015.

Care for God's Creation

Energy Efficiency

Double the funding for the Focus on Energy program to support efficient energy usage for both business and residential programs. Authorize the Focus on Energy program to allocate funds to market PACE programs across the state. Focus on Energy is our statewide program that helps residents and businesses select and install cost-effective solutions that save energy and money.

- PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) provides low-cost, long-term loans for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and water conservation improvements. The loan is repaid through the property tax bill, so there is no upfront cost, and ownership of the improvement transfers with the property.
- Energy efficiency helps business owners, homeowners, and renters in the PACE promotion save money by lowering energy usage and reducing air pollution's contribution to climate change.

- Congregations can use FOCUS funds to reduce our contribution to climate change and be an example for our communities.
- Focus on Energy creates high-paying jobs in manufacturing, including the installation and servicing of clean energy and energy conservation technologies. Jobs are also created indirectly, when money saved on energy bills is spent on other things.
- Energy efficiency and renewable energy can reduce energy costs for low-income customers, but they may not be able to afford the up-front cost. The Governor's budget provides funding for programs designed to help low-income households.

Renewable Energy and Jobs

Provide \$500,000 annually under the Wisconsin Fast Forward framework for green jobs training throughout the state.

- This will encourage individuals to follow conservation and environmental career paths that will benefit the whole state.
- Investing in the clean energy economy can spur job creation and economic growth for the state, helping Wisconsin recover from the current health and economic crisis.
- Green jobs can provide a way out of poverty for low-income persons. Many quality jobs in the clean energy economy are accessible to workers with a high school education, limited college, or an associate's degree.

Equity

Create the Office of Environmental Justice within the Department of Administration. The Office of Environmental Justice would collaborate across state agencies and engage with environmental justice advocates, communities of color, Native Nations, and low-income communities to design climate policies that reduce emissions and pollutants to address the cumulative and deadly impact that is concentrated in those communities.

- Communities of color, low-income communities, and immigrant communities are more likely to be exposed to air and water pollution and extreme heat, and they are often more vulnerable to flooding caused by climate change.
- Indigenous communities rely heavily on Wisconsin's land, water and wildlife for food, health, and cultural and spiritual identity, yet they are particularly vulnerable to the environmental impacts of climate change.
- Low-income communities often lack the resources to protect themselves and their families from the impacts of climate change or recover from climate disasters.
- The health impacts from climate change and burning fossil fuels are an added burden for low-income people and communities of color, who not only already bear higher levels of health risks than other groups, but also have more difficulty affording and getting access to quality health care.
- Any effort to address climate change must include communities of color, Native Nations, and low-income communities in identifying problems and crafting solutions.

Farmers and Land Conservation

- Authorize \$6.5 million in bonding for grants to counties for capital projects that implement land and water resource management plans under the Targeted Runoff Management program.
- The Targeted Runoff Management (TRM) Grant Program offers competitive grants for local governments for the control of pollution that comes from diffuse sources, also called “nonpoint source (NPS)” pollution. Grants from the TRM Program reimburse costs for agricultural or urban runoff management practices in targeted, critical geographic areas with surface water or groundwater quality concerns.
- Climate change leads to more extreme weather events, such as downpours and flooding, that increase agricultural runoff that causes water pollution.
- Water is life. We need to protect it.
- We can’t have a thriving economy or a healthy state in which to live, work, play, and raise families if we don’t conserve and protect the quality of our water resources.
- Farmers have much of Wisconsin’s precious resources of water and soil in their care, and we need to help them to exercise good stewardship.
- Runoff Management is a big issue for medium-sized and smaller farms have less capacity than large CAFOs (Confined Animal Feeding Operations) to implement practices to prevent runoff of manure or fertilizer into surface waters.

Note: Our coalition that organized Faith Advocacy for Climate Justice, led by LOPPW, discerned and agreed upon these Priorities. Thank you to one of our coalition members, Dr. Peter Bakken (WCC and Wisconsin Interfaith Power & Light) for the talking points.

Juvenile Justice

We are confident that if the budget item to return 17-year-old youth to the juvenile justice system is not included in the budget that it will become a separate bill. We have a wealth of information on this subject on the website that our Hunger Advocacy Fellow, Kyle Minden, organized for the Raise the Age Coalition: <https://raisetheagewi.org/>.

- Support eliminating automatic original adult court jurisdiction for youth under the age of 18. We advocate for policy will raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction so that the juvenile court system will have original court jurisdiction over all 17-year-olds.
- Forty-Seven states across the country send 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system.
- Raising the age has been proven to keep communities safer, decrease government spending, lower racial disparities, and, most importantly, improve the lives of youth caught in the criminal justice system.
- States that Raised the Age have seen crime rates plummet and improved outcomes for youth in the system. These outcomes include higher education rates, lower racial disparities, and improved mental health care.
- States are also seeing long-term fiscal benefits as more young people join the workforce instead of return to the justice system.

- There are mountains of evidence that “justice-involved youth are more likely to move beyond delinquency and successfully transition into adulthood if they are served by an effective youth justice system.”
- The juvenile justice system also better addresses mental health or substance abuse challenges by mandating an individualized assessment, offering AODA treatment, and opening opportunities for counseling and other trauma-informed measures. These programs help break a cycle of incarceration and trauma among young people.
- Wisconsin has the second highest black-white incarceration disparity in the country, and reforming how we treat the youngest people in our criminal justice system can have compounding effects in reducing racial disparities across the board.
- Kids Forward has found that the automatic transfer of young people into the adult system disproportionately affects youth of color. And once they are in the adult system, black and Native American youth “are more likely to face conviction in adult court, especially for drug-related crimes.”

Immigration

Drivers’ Licenses

The REAL ID Act was passed by Congress in 2005, enacting the 9/11 Commission’s recommendation that the Federal Government set standards for the issuance of sources of identification, such as driver’s licenses. This has created a great burden for undocumented Wisconsinites. “In the agricultural industry, a mainstay of Wisconsin’s economy, both the [Dairy Business Association \(DBA\)](#) and the [Wisconsin Farmers Union \(WFU\)](#) support providing driver’s licenses to non-citizens,” according to a Wisconsin Public Radio [article](#).

- Keep the provision for undocumented Wisconsinites to obtain drivers’ licenses enabling people who meet all of the other requirements to obtain drivers’ licenses. Especially because our state needs better mass transportation systems, drivers licenses for our undocumented neighbors would help them obtain and maintain employment.
- This is the humane thing to do at any time, but especially when considering how many of our frontline workers who are undocumented have served our state during the pandemic.
- Undocumented employees pay taxes on their income.
- 16 states and Washington, D.C. include this provision.
- There would increase state revenue if more people would purchase driver’s licenses. Businesses such as car dealerships and insurance companies would also benefit.
- Owners of farms, construction companies, and factories, which often employ undocumented workers would benefit.

Contact cindyc@loppw.org with questions.

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