



2023-2025 Wisconsin State Budget Requests

April 24, 2023

Dear Representative Born, Senator Marklein, Representative Katsma, Senator Strobel and other esteemed members of the Joint Finance Committee,

As the director of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin, I ask that you support including the budget items related to Focus on Energy, PFAS, language that includes adaptation to climate change in local disaster planning, driver's licenses for all, and returning 17-year-old youth to the juvenile justice system.

Focus on Energy (FOE) Requests

1. **Support increasing Focus on Energy funding.** The Governor's budget proposed doubling of the required utility contribution for the Focus on Energy program from 1.2 percent to 2.4 percent of annual operating revenues, which would generate an additional \$100 million in annual funding for the program.
2. **Support modifying the types of eligible projects** under FOE to include those that deploy electric technologies to meet energy needs currently served by other fuel sources.
3. **Add to the budget:** Utilizing the Focus on Energy Program to administer the distribution of grant funding that Wisconsin will receive from the federal Inflation Reduction Act.
 - Energy efficiency is one of the easier steps we can take to decrease energy needs and to save money. FOE is an established proven program that is worth investing more into.
 - FOE programs generate between \$2 - \$4 in benefits for every dollar spent. Using less energy and saving money on utility bills benefits to individuals, businesses, schools, and local governments.
 - We especially support the benefits to people who cannot always afford to make their homes more energy efficient. Individuals and families with lower incomes often live in homes with poor energy efficiency, which increases their energy usage and utility bills, as well as the use of carbon-based fuels

Addressing the Problem of PFAS Requests

1. Funding for municipal grants to address known contamination.
2. Testing Resources and Science Capacity at DNR: The Governor's proposal also includes funding to increase testing resources and science capacity at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to assist impacted communities.
3. Removing PFAS from Food Packaging.
4. Providing resources and support for private well owners impacted by PFAS contamination. This could be done through the state's well compensation program, which could help provide clean drinking water through filters, new wells, or connecting to municipal systems.
 - High levels of PFAS in the human body are tied to increased cholesterol levels, decreases in how well the body responds to vaccines.
 - PFAS also increases the risk of thyroid disease, reduced fertility in women, increased risks of

high blood pressure, and lower infant birth weights.

- Wisconsinites in all of our communities deserve to have clean drinking water.

Adaptation to Climate Change (planning for disasters) Request

Support comprehensive plans developed by municipalities to address climate change, require that local hazard mitigation plans include consideration of climate change, and require communities throughout the state to include climate change impacts in their community health improvement assessment and plans.

- Destructive impacts from climate change will continue even if we would suddenly stop all greenhouse gas emissions today. Adaptation is one of the yearly topics at the United Nation's international climate conference called Conference of Parties (COP). The need for our world to make plans to adapt is real.
- Wisconsin has seen in recent years, more intense and frequent heavy rains due to climate change can result in flooding, eroding soil and coastlines, washing out roads and bridges, breaking dams, overwhelming sewers and wastewater treatment plants and causing greater algae blooms, bodily harm and illness. The need for our municipalities to adapt is real.

Resources

- dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/PFAS dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/PFAS/Impacts
- [Focus on Energy Quadrennial Achievement Report](#)
- [Leveraging Focus on Energy® to Fight Soaring Energy Costs](#), Renew Wisconsin
- [As the shift to clean energy ramps up, Wisconsin's top utility regulator says energy efficiency is key](#), Wisconsin Public Radio
- How meteorologists cover climate change (Wisconsin Public Radio)
- [“Climate Change Impacts in Wisconsin”](#) (Department of Natural Resource)

We must act now to stop climate change from pushing more people into poverty. We know that climate impacts disproportionately affect those already most vulnerable,” said H.E. **Anne-Marie Trevelyan**, Secretary of State for International Trade and COP26 Champion for Adaptation and Resilience, of the United Kingdom – [Adaptation Fund](#)

Driver Licenses for our Immigrant Neighbors Background: Wisconsin once provided a pathway for our undocumented neighbors to obtain driver licenses. That changed in 2007. The federal 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. However, it was a state law that passed in 2006 and implemented in 2007 that unnecessarily prevented and continues to prevent many of our Wisconsin neighbors from driving.

As a person of faith, I believe in helping families to thrive and have enough to eat. Many of our immigrant neighbors who want to work, take care of their families, and respond to emergencies for which they need to drive, are prevented from doing so. With the lack of sufficient mass transportation throughout our state, providing a way for Wisconsinites who do not qualify for a Real ID is the humane thing to do.

- Restoring driver licenses will put more money back into our economy. People with driver licenses are more likely to work and spend money. Currently, many of our farmers and other business owners are having difficulty finding employees. Up to 80% of Wisconsin's dairy workers are immigrants.
- Restoring driver licenses will reduce the number of uninsured drivers and result in lower insurance premiums for already-insured Wisconsin drivers. According to the Colorado Fiscal

Institute, since the state of New Mexico began issuing licenses in 2003, the rate of uninsured vehicles decreased by almost 24 percent, and traffic fatalities fell 23 percent.

- Please support expanding our ability as a state to provide a pathway for obtaining a driver license. There is a successful program in other states and in Wisconsin.

Resources

- Wisconsin Public Radio: 'Driver's licenses for all'
- Wisconsin Coalition for Safe Roads
- Voces de la Frontera

Juvenile Justice Background: Under the provisions of 1995 Wisconsin Act 27, 17-year-olds alleged to have violated criminal law are subject to prosecution as adults, and juveniles under the age of 17 can be tried as adults when they are alleged to have committed certain serious crimes. A judge in the adult court system can waive 17-year-olds into the juvenile justice system but they begin in the adult system. Since the law was enacted in 1996, 17-year-old youth have been classified as adults, but only in criminal court proceedings in Wisconsin. As Governor Evers has stated, "We are one of the only states in the nation that has not made this evidence-based change in ensuring that youth are treated as youth, and that needs to change now."

- As a person of faith, I ask you to please support a criminal justice system that helps our young people to grow and thrive in society. Specifically, I ask that you support returning 17-year-old youth to the juvenile justice system instead of defaulting them into the adult court system regardless of their crime. There has been bipartisan support to make this happen in Wisconsin
- Wisconsin is one of three states that automatically sends 17-year-old youth into the adult court system. The legislatures in the other two states, Georgia and Texas, are currently discussing proposed legislation to change that.
- There are mountains of evidence that 17-year-old youth who are treated as youth in our criminal justice systems are more likely to move beyond delinquency and successfully transition into adulthood

The juvenile justice system 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 could have compounding effects in reducing racial disparities across the board.

Resources

- Raise the Age Coalition Website
- WSAW-TV – Governor Evers looks to return 17-year-olds to juvenile justice system

Sincerely yours,

Pastor Cindy Crane

Director of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin (a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), P.O. Box 14496, Madison, WI. 53708

As a person of faith and your constituent, I am asking that you include provisions and appropriate funding in the Wisconsin State Budget to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 17-year-old youth. Currently, we are one of only three states that still automatically treats 17-year-olds as adults, which leads to higher recidivism rates, higher government spending, higher racial disparities, and worse outcomes for our state's young people.

Raising the Age and moving 17-year-olds back into the juvenile justice system opens the door to age-appropriate rehabilitation that ensures young people are less likely to return to the justice system and more likely to live a healthy, successful life. This proper care makes our communities safer, lowers state spending, and addresses some of the underlying causes of why youth end up in the justice system. It is no wonder why Raise the Age is supported by Republicans, Democrats, and Independents across the state; it is simply good policy that benefits all of us.