

People of Faith United for Justice

April 29, 2015

Madison WI

Protecting the Safety Net

Our faith traditions have long recognized God's call to care for all and to protect the most vulnerable members of society. Social safety net programs, such as BadgerCare, FoodShare Employment and Training, and long-term care programs, uphold these obligations to care for the least among us by providing access to health care and needed aid for individuals with disabilities, the elderly and those in poverty.

The state budget should not create additional barriers that prevent individuals in need from accessing vital public assistance programs, nor should it make changes to our successful long-term care programs (Family Care, IRIS and Aging and Disability Resource Centers). We suggest the following changes to the state budget:

- **Remove unnecessary barriers to accessing public assistance from the state budget**, such as drug testing requirements, caps on enrollment in BadgerCare and requiring individuals below the poverty line to pay premiums for health care; instead, accept federal funding for Medicaid expansion.
- Preserve our current long-term care system and **remove the changes to Family Care, IRIS, and Aging and Disability Resource Centers** from the budget.
- Support the Governor's proposal to **provide \$2 million for treatment services to child victims of trafficking**.

Oppose Drug Testing Requirements for Accessing Public Assistance:

The proposed 2015-17 state budget requires individuals to undergo drug testing before they can access BadgerCare, unemployment insurance, employment training programs and FoodShare (food stamps).

Subjecting applicants for public assistance to drug testing only because they are dealing with poverty or loss of income only adds to the stigma of applying for public assistance. Moreover, it may discourage some from seeking the very help they and their families need.

Drug addiction is not simply a matter of moral weakness. It is rather a chronic illness that requires ongoing support and treatment. Nor is it a relatively simple problem that can be solved with one or two courses of treatment. Additionally, it is not clear in the Governor's proposal how the drug testing will be paid for or what happens if individuals cannot access either testing or treatment, as is the case for many Wisconsinites living in rural areas where there are no such services or where a lack of transportation creates and additional burden and barrier. There are many other questions about the implementation and consequences, both intended and unintended, related to this proposal.

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We agree that policies should help the needy without enabling dependency of those able to support themselves. But we should also avoid policies that create more stigma and barriers to people who are struggling in the current economy or that require us to abandon those among us who cannot help themselves, or who need a little more time, patience and assistance to be able to support themselves and their families. The Legislature should remove the drug testing requirements from the state budget.

Oppose Changes to BadgerCare, Accept Federal Funding for Medicaid Expansion

The 2013-15 state budget reduced BadgerCare income eligibility from 200% of the Federal Poverty Level to 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. The 2015-17 state budget would put additional barriers in place.

Childless adults seeking access to health care services through BadgerCare, whose yearly incomes are below \$11,770, will be required to: pay monthly premiums, undergo drug testing and lose coverage after 4 years whether or not their circumstances have changed. Making it more difficult for individuals living at or below the poverty line to access health care will not only result in even more people losing BadgerCare coverage, it will also create a coverage gap in Wisconsin, something the Governor promised would not happen when he unveiled his Medicaid plan two years ago.

Instead of making it more difficult for people living at or below the poverty line to access needed health care services, the Legislature should accept federal funds for Medicaid expansion, which would save Wisconsin \$345 million and cover an additional 81,000 Wisconsinites.

Oppose Dismantling of the Long-term Care System:

The budget proposal would dismantle Wisconsin's nationally-admired long-term care (LTC) system that provides critical supports to people with disabilities and older adults enabling them to stay in their own homes and avoid costly institutional care. Family Care and IRIS currently serve nearly 55,000 older adults and people with developmental or physical disabilities — all of whom qualify for a nursing home level of care.

The proposed budget would eliminate the self-directed IRIS program; radically change Family Care benefits and allow statewide for-profit health insurance companies to run the program; and give authority to the Department of Health Services (DHS) to eliminate county-run Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) by contracting out many of their functions to private, for-profit entities.

Wisconsin's current long-term care program has reduced long-term care spending as a share of the Medicaid budget by 10% over 10 years, ended waiting lists for services and kept people in their own homes. Our current, successful model does not need to be changed, and the overhaul of the long-term care system should be removed from the budget.

Support Efforts to Address Human Trafficking:

We support the Governor's proposal to include \$2 million to the Department of Children and Families for treatment services to child victims of trafficking.