Tuesday April 18, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform,

YWCA Madison opposes AB 238, AB 240, and AB 242.  Each of these three bills will lead to fewer Wisconsin residents receiving the housing and employment support they need to successfully move out of poverty.

AB 238 requests federal permission to require housing voucher recipients to meet work or training requirements. Housing is a core human need. Without housing, it is incredibly difficult to stabilize your life and take care of your family’s basic needs. At YWCA Madison, we support the Housing First model. Housing First prioritizes securing housing as quickly as possible, understanding that stable housing is the first step to securing employment and financial stability. This is national best practice: The National Alliance to End Homelessness has adopted Housing First as the proven best way to successfully combat homelessness and poverty. However, AB 238 conditions and/or prioritizes housing based on employment status. If this bill becomes law, fewer Wisconsin individuals and families will find their way out of poverty and homelessness.

AB 240 and AB 242 condition W-2 funding and will result in more individuals removed from the program for reasons not based on work performance. AB 240, instead of helping Wisconsin Works participants, creates a reason to remove them from the programming. Truant youth need support services and intervention. Removing their parents work support and case management is the opposite response these families need. Additionally, AB 242 expands the list of those drug tested, including all adult members of an individual's W-2 group whose income or assets are included in determining the individual's eligibility. That ridiculously holds W-2 recipients responsible for other adult family members’ actions. By expanding drug testing for W-2 recipients, instead of relying on performance and/or success in the program itself, you perpetuate the myth that those on public assistance are gaming the system or have drug addictions. AB 242 wastes both taxpayer money and government time testing individuals that are no more likely to use drugs than any other segment of the population. W-2 recipients need access to training and jobs, not drug testing.

We urge you to vote down AB 238, AB 240, and AB 242. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Carousel Bayrd, our Policy and Partnership Coordinator, at (608) 395-2196.

Sincerely,

Vanessa McDowell  
Interim CEO