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To: Joint Committee on Finance

Re: Statement on SB59\_AB56 executive budget proposal

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin (LWVWI) believes the biennial state budget should ensure a high quality of life and strong communities for the people of Wisconsin. League members in our state have studied many policy issues over the years, taking into account all sides of each debate. Based on these grassroots studies, the League has adopted policy positions in the broad areas of Government Structures, Natural Resources and Social Policy which guide our advocacy agenda. The League's positions reflect the consensus of our membership, including members of both major political parties and many independent voters.

The League offers the following guidance for lawmakers considering Governor Evers' executive budget proposal, AB 56/SB 59:

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## Government Structures

### **Redistricting Reform**

Governor Evers has called for a plan that requires the nonpartisan Legislative Reference Bureau to draft a set of maps, based on strict nonpartisan criteria, and may not consider such things as the residence of incumbents or previous election results. The current redistricting process of drawing maps is non-transparent and leads to legal challenges that cost taxpayers millions in unnecessary spending. Adoption of an “Iowa”-type model would be a vast improvement over the hyper-partisan gerrymandering process currently in use in Wisconsin, in which the majority party is able to draw maps to guarantee its own power and control.

We believe the budget should include sufficient funding to support the Legislative Reference Bureau to have the ability to carry out the function of drawing maps. However, the League of Women Voters has always advocated for the right of the public to have adequate opportunity to understand and review the actions of public officials. While we applaud the Governor’s support of nonpartisan redistricting, we do not believe the biennial budget bill is the appropriate vehicle for such a major policy change. We hope the legislature will join in support for an Iowa-model redistricting reform plan with the introduction of stand-alone legislation. A bill for redistricting reform will receive the public review, discussion and input it deserves. The League believes that ending partisan gerrymandering is critical for maintaining our democracy.

### **Wisconsin Election Commission and Election Security**

Election security is a top concern for the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, as well as the public. While we applaud the Governor's office for supporting an overall increase in expenditure authority for the Wisconsin Elections Commission, we are concerned about the Governor's proposal to take money from federal election security funding to pay for state voter mailings, especially those targeting unregistered voters. Election security funding should be used only for efforts related to election security and nothing else.

According to the Wisconsin Elections Commissions' March 2019 board meeting open session materials, \$371,300 of HAVA Election Security funds from the federal government would be used for portions of the ERIC program and its mailings. ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center) program sends postcards to unregistered voters about how to vote, and helps remove people that have died, moved or are no longer eligible to vote from our voter rolls. ERIC has bipartisan support, garnering the support of clerks, elections officials and voter advocacy groups like the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin. As more states join ERIC (which now totals 26, including Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois), the program becomes even more effective because more states are sharing data about individuals moving and registering in their

state. The Governor's proposals such as automatic registration will help unregistered voters participate in the voting process, but does not replace important programs like ERIC mailings.

Wisconsin has been a top target for voter database attacks. Instead of using the budget to address a long term solution to funding election security, the Governor's office has done the opposite and proposed using existing, temporary funding for election security to fund other necessary election projects. For the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin it is not an either/or problem. Rather we must fully fund all aspects of our election system, including database maintenance, election security, and efforts to educate and register all voters. We encourage the Wisconsin Elections Commission, Governor Evers and the Legislature to work together to fund and protect our election system.

## Natural Resources

### **Water Protection and Quality**

Contaminated drinking water is a serious issue faced by a growing number of Wisconsin residents. Reports from locations around the state of well water containing E.coli, nitrate, PFAS compounds and other contaminants are growing, and there are still numerous lead service lines in use.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin believes that access to clean water is a public trust and a fundamental right. High quality water is essential to maintaining our quality of life and the strength of our economy. We were therefore pleased when Governor Evers declared 2019 the "Year of Clean Drinking Water" soon after taking office. We are gratified to find that his proposed biennial budget reflects that priority.

By restoring science to the Department of Natural Resources the executive budget addresses not only currently well-known and understood problems, such as the need for replacing lead pipes, but also emerging problems that require more research.

Specifically, the budget calls for an additional \$70 million in bonding for water quality programs, including funding to replace lead service lines under the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program and to support existing and new programs to reduce the incidence of childhood lead poisoning. It includes funding to local government units and farm groups to reduce pollution under the Safe Drinking Water Program, the Targeted Runoff Management Program and the Soil and Water Resource Management Program. These programs provide assistance for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure (education, outreach, data-informed decision making) projects.

Governor Evers' budget proposal makes it easier for individuals to obtain funding under the Well Compensation Grant Program. It also increases Concentrated Animal Feed Operation (CAFO) fees which are currently the lowest among five midwestern states (MN, IL, MI, IA, WI). Under the proposed budget, the CAFO revenues will be used to create five new positions devoted mostly to CAFO regulations. The Governor's budget calls for the creation of a Bureau of Natural Resources Science and the funding of five additional science positions. At least two of these new positions must be devoted to work on a serious emerging health issue, contamination by per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The work would include the development of a model to identify and prioritize sites with likely PFAS contamination.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin applauds these funding initiatives as significant but they are only a first step toward clean drinking water for everyone in our state. The \$40 million allocated for lead pipes, for example, would replace only about 16,000 of the estimated 170,000 lead service lines in Wisconsin. A long-term funding commitment is still needed if Wisconsin wants to guarantee access to clean water for everyone.

In early January, in response to the discovery of a large number of contaminated wells, the Assembly Speaker announced the creation of a bipartisan task force to study state water quality. In March, this task force began to hold information-gathering sessions. We hope this is an indication that clean water will be one area in which there will be productive collaboration between the legislature and the Governor.

### **DNR Standards Based on Sound Scientific Research**

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is pleased that the Governor's budget proposal creates a Bureau of Natural Resources Science in the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks of the Department of Natural Resources. The Governor's proposal also authorizes 5.0 new full time positions. At least two of these positions are assigned to work on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination of water resources. The funding for this will come from the segregated fees deposited in the Environmental Fund associated with the DNR. Until recently DNR research was based on DNR priorities and largely funded by state, federal and non-governmental funding sources.

This new Bureau of Natural Resources Science will not fully restore the 18.4 scientist positions that were eliminated in the 2015-2017 Biennial Budget, but this proposal does restore a lost focus for independent scientific research in the DNR. The Wisconsin DNR once enjoyed a proud reputation for its natural resource management research, evidence-based decision-making and professionalism. Restoring the DNR's reputation starts with this investment in personnel and re-creation of the Science Bureau.

It is only right that applied scientific information and impartial, objective evidence be the groundwork for the DNR's oversight role in protecting the health of our natural resources including the air and water that impact human and wildlife health in our state.

### **Stewardship and State Parks**

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is a longtime supporter of the forward-looking and effective State Stewardship Program. During its 25-year history, this program has preserved nearly 650,000 acres of valuable habitat for public use and benefit. We support reauthorization of the Stewardship Program, which has had broad bipartisan and public support.

This major parks, recreation and land management program is scheduled to expire in 2020. Governor Evers has proposed to extend the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, which supports the program, at the current funding level through June 30, 2020, using unspent bonding authority from the current program authorization, estimated to be at least \$68 million. The Governor also proposes to convene a task force to consider future directions and make recommendations for the future. The Governor also proposes to increase general operations funding for state parks and recreational areas by \$1.4 million, to cover increased costs associated with higher attendance in the parks.

The League supports these needed investments in the state's scenic beauty, extensive parks systems and recreational opportunities. Tourism is a significant driver of Wisconsin jobs and the state economy. Clean public facilities and well managed parks are key to continued success.

## **Social Policy**

### **Public Education Financing**

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin strongly supports the reinvestment in public education proposed in Governor Evers' state budget. It provides a more equitable school aid formula and restores the promised two-thirds level of state funding for our schools with increases for special education. This financing is crucial for all of our children in both urban and rural school districts in our state.

The proposal to stop the expansion of choice schools is a positive move. Schools receiving taxpayer funds should be within the public system and should have the same standards of accountability as the public schools.

It is important to note that in the past few years Wisconsin has seen a great number of successful school referenda. In the April 2, 2019 elections, Wisconsin voters approved school district referenda worth nearly \$770 million in new borrowing and revenue authority.

Local taxpayers have continually voted to remedy financial shortfalls for their schools and clearly demonstrated their support for education. This legislature must do so as well.

### **UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System**

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin believes the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System should promote equal opportunity for all Wisconsin residents to access a high-quality post-secondary education. We are pleased to see a number of provisions in Governor Evers' biennial budget that would help accomplish this. The budget proposes to:

- Continue the freeze on resident undergraduate tuition in the UW System for two additional years. This freeze has been in effect since 2013.
- Provide an additional \$150 million in funding for the UW System, including approximately \$50 million to fund the continued freeze in tuition and \$45 million in additional support for high-demand majors such as nursing and computer science. These measures are intended to promote workforce development and expand "student success and attainment".
- Provide funding for a 2% salary increase for UW and other state employees.
- Provide \$10 million for scholarships or student loan repayment for future nurse educators who agree to teach nursing for at least three years at a UW campus. Student demand for these programs is high, but recruitment and retention of nursing faculty has been particularly difficult.
- Provide funding to add 20 UW-Extension county-based agents to provide assistance to farmers, individuals and local government.
- Provide a 7% annual increase to the Wisconsin Technical College System to allow campuses "to develop innovative programs and improve support services for nontraditional students such as ex-offenders."
- Allow certain undocumented individuals to qualify for resident tuition at a UW campus or Wisconsin technical college. Eligibility is limited to students who have lived in the state for a specified number of years, have graduated from a Wisconsin high school or have a high school equivalency, and have or plan to apply for a permanent resident visa.
- Provide an additional \$17.4 million for need-based grants for resident students. Students from the UW, technical colleges, private nonprofit universities and tribal colleges would be eligible to receive these grants.
- Propose the establishment of a committee, with representatives from Department of Financial Institutions, the State Treasurer, and the Higher Education Aids Board, to study

the creation of a state-run student loan refinancing authority. The committee is expected to develop a proposal for the 2021-23 budget to help lower interest rate costs for students who have already graduated and carry high levels of student debt.

## **Medicaid Expansion**

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin believes that every resident of our state should have access to affordable, quality health care. To that end, we advocate for full Medicaid expansion under BadgerCare. Specifically, we support the Governor's proposal to expand BadgerCare eligibility to cover approximately 80,000 more adults, by lifting the income eligibility ceiling for a single individual from \$12,490/year to \$17,236/year.

In Wisconsin, about 8% of adults and families -- primarily the working poor and their children -- did not have health insurance coverage for at least part of 2017, the last year for which these figures are available. That is unnecessary and unacceptable. Wisconsin taxpayers have been sending money to Washington for Medicaid expansion for several years, and it is high time that our state government accept the available federal funding and apply it to improving healthcare right here in our state.

In addition to the obvious benefits for the additional people who will enroll in the BadgerCare program, this proposal is a keystone measure in the Governor's budget for funding other programs the League supports. The expansion itself will increase federal funding for health care in Wisconsin, yielding a net savings for state taxpayers of about \$160 million/year. The Governor proposes to use these funds provide desperately needed funding for such items as:

- Increased payment rates for certified child care providers;
- Additional inspectors for assisted living facilities;
- Additional nursing educators and dental therapist training;
- Additional support for the ombudsman program in the Board on Aging and Long Term Care, which protects the rights of long term care consumers.

Medicaid expansion will help keep healthcare costs down, and it will return significant federal tax dollars to our state. It is an obvious win-win for Wisconsin.

## **Transportation and Public Transit**

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is generally pleased by the increased support for public transit proposed in Governor Evers' executive budget.

Although we would like to see a greater investment in transit and transportation aids, this is a good start in the right direction, with increases in both revenue and spending for public transit

and local roads, and a minimum of additional expense for building new highways.

Specifically, the League recommends:

- Increase in General Transit Aids by 10% per year, or \$11 million annually;
- Creation of transit capital assistance program of \$10 million in the second year of the biennium;
- Increase of 10% for paratransit aids;
- Increase of \$6 million for specialized transportation services that serve seniors and individuals with disabilities;
- Increase of 10% for General Transportation Aids to maintain county and municipal roads;
- Increase Local Road Improvement Program by \$1.9 million, or about 4%, over the biennium.

The League also supports a measure to restore the flexibility of local governments in labor negotiations and their ability to use eminent domain authority for bike and pedestrian paths.

Of course, any increase in spending should be linked to a responsible source of funding. The League supports the measures proposed in the executive budget to raise revenue for transportation in Wisconsin, including the first increase in the gas tax since 2006, an increase in the heavy vehicle registration fee and an increase in the title fee.

## **Corrections and Juvenile Justice**

In recent months the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has been pleased by the bipartisan support expressed for a number of corrections reform initiatives that we support based on our [Administration of Justice positions](#). However, in analyzing the Governor's proposed biennial budget, we have serious concerns about some detention facilities and we find varying levels of support for programs aimed at changing offender behavior and enhancing opportunities for successful re-entry of ex-offenders into society.

Since the 2017 budget cycle the League has raised grave concerns about the well-being of youth held in the Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake facilities. We were very pleased with the bipartisan move to close those facilities. Now efforts are underway to establish local secure residential care facilities in various counties, which will enhance rehabilitation opportunities because of locations near families and their communities. While the process appears to be taking more time than anticipated, the League believes it is necessary to maintain some specific closure date for Lincoln Hills.

In this 2019 budget, our Milwaukee County League has testified about the proposed funding to maintain the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility. There have been a number of unfortunate

deaths related to the existing conditions in that building, putting the welfare of people in jeopardy. LWV Milwaukee County has joined with many groups involved in criminal justice advocacy, as well as a past Secretary of the Department of Corrections, in calling for closure of this facility.

This detention facility is used primarily to incarcerate people who are on community supervision and have not committed a new crime. The state of Wisconsin detains people on community supervision at twice the rate of the national average. In the place of the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility, we support alternatives to revocation which would utilize community sites, having programs that connect ex-offenders to productive accountability and actual rehabilitation opportunities.

We urge lawmakers to provide much more funding for the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) program, a popular and successful initiative to provide alternatives to incarceration for offenders. TAD was recently mentioned by Assembly Republicans as one of their priorities, and it has long been supported by the Democrats. Yet the Governor's proposed budget for this program falls far short of the \$15 million per year increase he said he would support.

The Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS) program is targeted to inmates with a serious and persistent mental illness. It is jointly run by the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health Services, and it helps connect inmates to housing, health care, educational opportunities and transportation upon release. The Governor's budget proposes to expand the OARS program, which currently operates in 44 counties, to the entire state. We support expansion of this program, which leads to more successful reintegration of offenders into society.

The Non-Violent Offender Treatment Diversion Pilot Program is a similar program, except that the funds are provided to police departments. We support the Governor's proposal to continue this program and expand it to more counties.

The League believes that policy changes should be passed in separate legislation with a separate hearings, rather than being wrapped into the biennial budget. Governor Evers' budget proposes to return 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system, which would provide age-appropriate treatment and reduce criminalization. The League has long advocated for this reform, as Wisconsin is one of only six states that require 17-year-olds be judged and sentenced in an adult court, rather than in juvenile court. However, we think this matter should be addressed and reformed properly with separate legislation. We hope to see legislative action on this soon.