



**Wisconsin 2021-23 Biennial Budget Statement
Summary of Action Requests**

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

April 21, 2021

NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Action Requested: Protect public health and drinking water supplies by implementing the Wisconsin PFAS (polyfluoroalkyl substances) Action Council's (WisPAC) PFAS Action Plan.

- Provide \$20 million in grants to local communities to investigate and address PFAS contamination.
- Increase by eleven (11) FTE DNR staffing to implement the PFAS Action Plan, including assessing the toxicity and developing standards for the growing number of PFAS compounds of emerging concerns, and developing/improving testing methodologies for PFAS contamination of water, land, and air.
- Provide \$2.11 million to DNR/State Lab/certified private labs for testing all public water supply wells and sampling of some surface and waste waters as well as testing and mitigating ongoing state-lead PFAS contaminated sites.
- Provide \$1 million to DATCP TO collect, store and dispose of firefighting foam containing PFAS.

Action Requested: Protect life and property (public and private) from increasingly extreme weather events by funding stormwater and flood control programs.

- Authorize \$12 million in bonding authority for urban non-point source cost sharing and the municipal flood control program. Of that \$12 million, \$8 million must be set aside for the municipal flood control program
- Provide \$1 million for the preparation of flood insurance studies and flood mapping projects and a project position to identify and map structures located within floodways
- Provide \$1.8 million for grants to counties for additional county conservation staff to support municipal climate change resiliency efforts.
- Provide \$7.3 million for county conservation staff to support land and water conservation
- Provide \$6.5 million in bonding for grants to counties to implement land and water resources management plans

Action Requested: Support the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to ensure continuity and protection of the lands, waters and biodiversity of resources that support our tourism and forestry industries and provide mental serenity, natural beauty and active recreation to all residents and visitors.

- Reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program for 10 more years at \$70 million in bonding levels per year.

FOCUS ON ENERGY (FOE)

Action Requested: Double the investment in Wisconsin's award-winning Focus on Energy program, so that more businesses, farmers and households can lower their energy bills by conserving energy.

- Increase from 1.2% to 2.4% (or more) of operating revenues for Focus on Energy programs. FOE is oversubscribed so those eager to conserve energy that they currently pay for are left waiting in line.
- Support utility company and FOE efforts to reduce overall peak generation demands.
- Create a carve out targeted for low-income residents.

Action Requested: Increase the capabilities of all Wisconsin local and tribal governments to reduce costs of public operations while reducing carbon emissions.

- Fully fund the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy at the Department of Administration to ensure a successful educational and policy outreach program.
- Assist local governments in planning, data collection and implementation of their community plans to ensure that all communities will be successful in reducing carbon emissions, reducing the costs of public operations, and building resilient and sustainable public infrastructure.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTHCARE COVERAGE

Action Requested: Expand access to Medicaid.

- Accept the Governor's proposal to expand BadgerCare eligibility to cover approximately 91,000 more adults.
- Accept federal funding and release state dollars to be used for other purposes such as providing increased funding to hospitals serving certain categories of Medicaid recipients (e.g., disproportionate share and critical access hospitals).

Action Requested: Address social determinants of health, such as homelessness and food insecurity.

- Implement the Medicaid community health benefit that provides funding for nonmedical services such as housing referrals, nutritional mentoring, stress management and other services and also a Healthy Eating Incentives pilot program.
- Increase funding to provide for a variety of homelessness prevention programs recommended by the Interagency Council on Homelessness. Priority should be given on the waiting list for WHEDA's Choice Voucher Program to homeless children and their families.

Action Requested: Preserve and expand Wisconsin residents' health insurance issuance and coverage protections:

- Prohibit health insurance providers from denying issuance or establishing higher premiums or out-of-pocket charges based on preexisting conditions, sexual orientation, gender identity, health status, or medical history.
- Prohibit health insurance providers from establishing annual or lifetime limits on health insurance plan benefits.
- Require all health insurance plans to provide coverage for the ten essential health benefits categories covered under the Affordable Care Act.
- Require all health insurance plans to provide coverage for certain preventive services at no cost to the plan holder.
- Eliminate balance billing ("surprise billing") by out-of-network providers for emergency, ambulatory and inpatient services.
- Require that good faith estimates of out-of-pocket costs be provided to healthcare recipients before services are delivered.
- Ensure that life sustaining medications, such as insulin, are available and easily affordable for everyone.

Action Requested: Address healthcare disparities that are a consequence of individuals' low incomes, geographic location, race or ethnicity.

- Provide the full spectrum of healthcare services to every Wisconsin resident including preventive, acute care and emergency services, as well as dental care, chronic disease management, mental health parity, and long term care.
- Emphasize access to primary and preventative services.
- Expand programs to reduce maternal mortality and support women during the prenatal, birthing and postpartum periods.
- Offer educational loan forgiveness to newly trained healthcare providers in return for their agreeing to practice in underserved geographic areas or among underserved populations.
- Help finance free and charitable clinics and community health centers.
- Support proactive DNR and DHS attention to emerging contaminants in water, air and land resources.
- Encourage government and businesses to cooperatively eliminate air pollutants and rid public and private water supplies of lead, nitrate and PFAS contaminants.

Action Requested: Address the needs of family caregivers, both family and caregiver employees.

- Enhance the care received by those who require care with everyday activities of daily living.
- Increase funding for nursing homes with the funds targeted toward those caring for facility residents.
- Financial support for long-term managed care organizations and providers of personal care direct care services.

Action Requested: Allocate the funding public health agencies need to carry out their emergency and ongoing roles.

- Provide state and local public health agencies additional support and resources to continue their primary services and to coordinate services with private healthcare providers. This should include, for example, ready availability of no-fee COVID testing and vaccination.
- Provide local and state public health agencies and departments the resources they need to focus on both ongoing and newly emerging public health concerns, including communicable disease prevention, surveillance, and intervention; immunizations; health promotion; chronic disease prevention; occupational health; drinking water quality; and environmental hazards such as lead poisoning and PFAS.
- Address the global climate emergency, which continues to threaten public health.

Action Requested: Combat childhood lead poisoning in urban areas and throughout the state by funding increased testing, parental education, home assessments, lead abatement and additional birth-to-three services for children who are lead poisoned; adopt requests from the Coalition on the Lead Emergency (COLE):

- \$20.3 million over the biennium for local health departments to increase current interventions for children and families:
 - \$9.5 million to increase testing Wisconsin children at risk for lead poisoning;
 - \$900,000 additional to educate parents about lead hazards and lead poisoning prevent
 - \$9.9 million increase over the biennium to expand services in the Birth to 3 Program to support education and development of children affected by lead poisoning.
- \$23.8 million over the biennium to reduce lead poisoning by paint – and add \$20 million in federal matching funds:
 - \$11.8 million additional funding for local health departments to conduct lead hazard investigations and issue lead abatement orders for homes endangering children;
 - At least \$8 million as a state revenue match to leverage an additional \$20 million in federal dollars (CHIP) for the Lead-Safe Homes program, to fund remediation of deteriorating lead-based paint hazards and increase associated workforce development; and
 - \$4 million for the Windows Plus Program, to fund remediation of friction surfaces that grind lead paint into dust (like windows).
- At least \$40 million over the biennium to replace lead service lines to reduce the risk to children and especially to formula-fed newborns and infants.

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VOTING RIGHTS

Action Requested: Make voter registration easier, more efficient and more secure through Automatic Voter Registration.

- Have the Wisconsin Elections Commission work with the Department of Transportation to codify automatic voter registration, which would verify and transmit voter registration updates and applications to improve accuracy of voter rolls and ensure that only eligible citizens are registered to vote.

Action Requested: Prioritize increasing voting access for the greatest number of people while assuring access for the most vulnerable.

- Develop a nonpartisan, transparent redistricting process to be used in 2021 and beyond.
- Focus on expanded Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) access by expanding both DMV hours and locations, and improving ADA accessibility of DMV locations, to ensure that all voters who need ID for voting are able to obtain it.
- Prioritize ADA-compliant absentee ballots so that voters with disabilities have equitable access to vote from home privately and independently without having to risk their health.

Action Requested: The state budget and legislative agenda should reflect strong commitment to democratic values and should prioritize voter rights and access.

- Ensure adequate funding for statewide election administration, prioritizing election security.
- Ensure that voters have fair access to the ballot when voting in person or by absentee ballot.
- Protect and expand voter access instead of allowing vulnerable communities to be disenfranchised.
- Protect early voting and consider legislation or reforms that would expand early voting hours, especially weekend hours before Election Day.
- Promote automatic voter registration.
- Ensure adequate election administration funding to the WEC and to all municipal elections administrators in order to ensure safe, fair and accessible elections;
- Adopt nonpartisan maps that require elected officials to represent all of their constituents.
- Work to make absentee voting more accessible by removing witness signature requirements or by allowing more exemptions for special circumstances.

REDISTRICTING REFORM

Governor Evers has called for the legislature to take up the maps prepared by the Peoples Maps Commission, which will be 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 of dollars in unnecessary spending. Adoption of a redistricting system incorporating Wisconsin demographics without voting data would be a vast improvement over the hyper-partisan gerrymandering process now in use. In Wisconsin, the majority party is able to draw maps to guarantee its own power and control.

In the interest of increased transparency, the LWV supports the Governor's recommendation that all legislative records on redistricting be retained for 10 years and that all legislative meetings on redistricting comply with open meetings requirements.

We believe the budget should include sufficient funding to support the maps developed by the Peoples Maps Commission. 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 would prefer to see such a major policy change in stand-alone legislation, we have been lobbying for nonpartisan redistricting since the 1970's and believe it is high time to adopt this vital, fundamental reform. The League believes that ending partisan gerrymandering is critical for maintaining our democracy.

TRANSPORTATION, PUBLIC TRANSIT AND ACTIVE MOBILITY

Action Requested: Improve the smooth, safe, energy efficient flow of humans and freight throughout Wisconsin by equitable sharing of revenues from state fuel taxes, registration and licensing fees, and federal sources among all forms of transportation.

- Limit commitments to new major road replacements and/or expansions in order to focus those funds on “Fix It First” maintenance of bridges and “backbone” roads in poor repair.
- Enhance and extend the network of public multi-modal transportation options provide access to public transit for workers, students, individuals with disabilities and older Wisconsinites by increasing investments for programs that supplement public transit and in general transit operating assistance, paratransit services, job access transit programs, tribal elderly transportation aids, and specialized transit assistance programs.
- Authorize \$5 million in bonding for electric vehicle charging stations and allocate \$10 million of the remaining Volkswagen emissions settlement funds to be dedicated to the reestablishment of an electric vehicle charging station grant program administered by the Department of Administration. Increase General Transit Aids for operations by 10% per year.
- Increase the Transit Capital Improvement Grant Program by \$50 million per year.
- Increase paratransit aids by 10%.
- Increase by \$6 million or more the allocation for specialized transportation services that serve seniors and individuals with disabilities.
- Increase General Transportation Aids by 10% each year to maintain county and municipal roads as well as bicycle and pedestrian paths and facilities.
- Increase Local Road Improvement Program by 4%.
- Restore the flexibility of local governments in labor negotiations and their ability to use eminent domain authority for bike and pedestrian paths.
- Link any increase in funding to a responsible source of that funding.
- Raise the total revenues for all forms of transportation in Wisconsin by including the first increase in the state gas tax since 2006 and an increase in the heavy vehicle registration fee.
- Restore access to driver’s licenses for all regardless of immigration status, and end the practice of suspending licenses solely due to inability to pay fines.

BROADBAND

Action Requested: Adequately fund expansion of broadband in rural and low-income urban areas.

- Include money in the budget to increase the Public Service Commission broadband expansion program
- Allow electric utilities and cooperatives to install, maintain, and own broadband infrastructure
- Expand granular (at household level) data mapping to monitor broadband capacity throughout the state.
- Create an Internet Assistance Fund to subsidize broadband for low-income households.
- Increase consumer protections in regard to broadband. Support municipal broadband extending and expanding broadband infrastructure.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Action Requested: Place a moratorium on expansion of the voucher programs and independent (non-district) charter schools.

- Place a moratorium on voucher and independent charter school expansion.
- End the Special Needs Scholarship Program, which currently provides private schools \$12,723 for each special education student enrolled.

Action Requested: Focus state funding on resources for children and their needs and provide sufficient funding for school districts to do so.

- Increase reimbursement for special education to 60%
- Implement broadband connectivity in all areas of Wisconsin and provide transportation funds in all rural areas so that all children can be educated adequately.
- Provide adequate transportation funds in rural areas.
- Provide sufficient money to school districts to fund necessary services for all students, including those with high needs, through weighting of the Vincent v. Voight categories and other categories such as mental health, early childhood, poverty, and English language learners.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Action Requested: Support Treatment Alternative and Diversion Program (TAD).

- Increase funding by \$15 million in the second year of the biennium and expand individual eligibility.
- Allow grants to be used for expanding their focus beyond drug and alcohol issues to include evidence- based practices targeted to the population served.
- Reduce the financial match requirement from 25% to 10%.
- Allow rather than require participant fees.
- Change the grant process to a 4-year cycle to coincide better with the state budget process.

Action Requested: Earned Release Program: Increase funding by \$3,449,000 over the biennium and increase staffing by 33 treatment specialists and reallocating 6 positions.

- Add staffing to 12 facilities, including the Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility.

Action Requested: Increase Windows to Work biennial funding by \$500,000.

- Add \$250,000 in each year of the biennium to permit an additional 90 incarcerated persons per year to participate.

Action Requested: Opening Avenues to RE-Entry Success (OARS): Add \$2.2 million in 2021-22 and \$3 million in 2022-23.

- Add funding to permit participation of an increase of 167 incarcerated persons.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Action Requested: Support the return of 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system.

- Return of 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system, which would provide age-appropriate treatment and reduce criminalization.
- Phase out the use of “Type 1” facilities for severe juvenile offenders, instead focusing on community-based services and sentencing of young people in age-appropriate methods.
- Closing the Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake facilities and instead establish secure residential care facilities to provide young people rehabilitation opportunities close to their families and communities.