



**Wisconsin 2021-23 Biennial Budget Statement  
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin**

**April 21, 2021**

A strong education ensures that Wisconsin's children can actively participate in the work force and in our democracy. Public schools provide the basis for democracy. They are **public**- to provide for the common good. In public schools students learn to get along and work cooperatively with a wide variety of persons, which is necessary for democracy. The 860,000 students who attend public schools are the majority of this state's students, and they are the future of this state.

Although public school districts can increase property taxes to offset vouchers, that is not an easy or reliable source of money to replace voucher funds. Property taxes in Wisconsin are already among the highest in the nation. It is important to note that in the past few years Wisconsin has seen a great number of successful referenda for operating expenses and capital improvement for school districts. Local taxpayers have continually voted to remedy financial shortfalls for their schools and clearly demonstrated their support for education. The Legislature needs to demonstrate support for public schools that is equal to support by local district taxpayers.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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).**

**Background:** TAD allows counties to offer treatment and diversion programming to adult offenders when substance abuse or mental health issues contribute to their criminal activity. Research found that for every \$1 spent on TAD programming, \$8.68 for diversion and \$4.17 for treatment are saved. And, 97% of TAD graduates remained out of prison post-program.

#### **Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** Increased funding and staffing will permit adding 990 individuals to the program. It would expand the earned release program to include programming such as educational, vocational, and treatment that are evidence-based and will reduce recidivism. With a waiting list of thousands, and a focus on the 69% of admitted prisoners with substance abuse issues, the program prevents future substance abuse disorders and related criminal activity. To be eligible an inmate must be a non-violent offender and have an AODA need.

#### **Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

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

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

**Background:** Windows to Work is a pre-and post-release program. It starts incarcerated persons in the process to prepare for post-incarceration employment by assisting with the development of job readiness skills such as financial literacy, job seeking, applications and resumes. Post-incarceration it assists with job search and job retention for 12 months following release.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** OARS provides intensive case management and mental health services to offenders who volunteer and are referred by DOC staff, and who have at least 6 months of post-release supervision remaining. Services assist with housing, access to medication and psychiatric care, transportation, employment, education and others.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** Our positions about juvenile justice are consistent with those concerning justice for adults in their support for humane punishments that seek to avoid criminalization. In the case of juvenile justice, however, we also believe that it is very important that the age and level of responsibility of the child be taken into consideration in sentencing and other involvement with the criminal justice system.

We strongly support the return of 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 three states that require 17-year-olds to be judged and sentenced in an adult court. We are pleased that Gov. Evers' budget includes an increase in youth aid payments by \$18.9 million that would help support counties for the costs associated with implementation of this change.

The League was an energetic advocate for the bipartisan legislation aimed at closing the Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake facilities. Its implementation would have established secure residential care facilities to provide young people rehabilitation opportunities close to their families and communities. Lack of adequate funding prevented realization of this goal.

Gov. Evers' budget calls for a significant change to this legislation and provides other measures intended to reform the juvenile justice system. He would 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. We strongly support these concepts but realize they have policy as well as budget implications. The League believes that policy changes should be enacted through the ordinary legislative process and urges prompt action on these important reforms.

## 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.**

**Background:** In 2019, in response to the discovery of a large number of contaminated drinking water wells, the Assembly Speaker created a Task Force to study state water quality. The many information-gathering sessions held by the Task Force led to the introduction of a number of bipartisan bills concerning water quality. They also highlighted a growing concern about PFAS contamination which ultimately led to the formation of WisPAC.

PFAS are artificial chemical compounds that are highly toxic and are nearly indestructible. They bioaccumulate and are known to cause serious health problems, including cancer, liver damage, and developmental defects. A growing number of Wisconsin communities are discovering this emerging contaminant in their water supply at concentrations high enough to require shutting wells and/or distribution of bottled water.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin strongly believes that access to clean water is a public trust and a fundamental right. The League is a strong supporter of clean drinking water and the regulation of any contaminants and therefore thanks the Speaker's Task Force for its work on these issues.

**Specifically, we support the many high priority items contained in the PFAS Action Plan:**

- Provide \$20 million in grants to local communities to investigate and address PFAS contamination. RATIONAL: The ability to address and treat contaminated drinking water, hold or treat municipal biosolids, contain and treat firefighting foam, address legacy contamination at commercial airports or address abandoned contaminated sites for the safety of their citizens can be significant and expensive challenges for local governments. They are usually able to address issues specific to their areas when provided with adequate state funding.
- 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. RATIONAL: The development of enforceable standards for two of the best understood PFAS compounds is near completion and those for another three dozen are underway. However, the PFAS family consists of at least 9,000 compounds, each with a slightly different chemical structure and different degree of toxicity. The sampling, analysis, and removal of the different PFAS compounds is an emerging science.

- 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. RATIONAL: Because of its widespread use, persistence and mobility, PFAS is present across the globe and almost every person has some trace amount in his/her blood. Yet it is not known how many of Wisconsin's public and private wells are contaminated because of lack of testing.
- Provide \$1 million to DATCP TO collect, store and dispose of firefighting foam containing PFAS. RATIONAL: The use of firefighting foam containing PFAS by fire departments and commercial airports has been a major source of PFAS contamination. Most of them still have such foam in their inventory and look to the bipartisan 2019 WI Act 101 and SB156 to dispose of it since this "forever chemical" is not easily destroyed.

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

**Background:** The Great Lakes states, including Wisconsin, have seen an alarming increase in precipitation and a more than doubling of the number of "billion dollar flood disaster" events over the past two decades<sup>1</sup>. What used to be a 100-year rainfall and flood event is now occurring more frequently and the 100-year floodplain is expanding. Over the past two decades, the increase in DNR's bounding authority for cost-sharing and flood control projects has not kept up with the growing need for such support, and the requests under the municipal flood control program keep exceeding the available funds.

The county conservation office plays a key role in the support and implementation of activities that prevent or reduce runoff of nutrients but those same activities also flood control activities. Based on the input from stakeholders during the many information-gathering sessions, the Speaker's Task Force found that the work of the county conservation office is extremely important and that there is a need for an increase in staffing and grant money.

LWVWI believes that planning and regulatory involvement by the state, either directly or indirectly, is needed in areas, such as natural hazard lands, where dangers to public health and to life and property may result. The League therefore thanks the Speaker's Task Force proposals in support of funding related directly or indirectly to flood control activities.

**Specifically, we support greater investment in activities that not only protect the quality of our water but also improve our flood resilience:**

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<sup>1</sup> NOAA: Billion Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters>Events



- 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.**

**Background:** The very popular Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program purchases natural area lands and conservation easements that provide wildlife habitat, water resources, and recreational opportunities for our growing population and our thriving tourism and forestry industries. The Stewardship Fund match grant program (\$1 state for \$1 local match) to Wisconsin Land Trusts multiplies state dollars and expands parks, trails, and facilities further throughout the state.

A study by the Outdoor Industry Association shows that Wisconsin outdoor recreation generates 17.9 billion dollars in direct consumer expenditures annually that supports 168,000 direct jobs in Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

Benefits equivalent to two billion dollars annually in the form of air and water filtration, flood protection, carbon biosequestration, and increased recreational opportunities result from continued protection of Stewardship Program natural resources. As of 2020, 93% of Wisconsin residents live within 1 mile of a property that has received a Knowles-Nelson Stewardship investment. Yet the program only costs \$19.75 per person per year.<sup>3</sup>

The DNR Parks and Recreation Bureau Director testified to a Senate Committee in April 2019 that more than 17.5 million people visited more than 100 state park properties statewide annually. Yet Stewardship expenditures have not kept pace with the public demand for outdoor recreational opportunities and facilities. Since 2007 the Stewardship Fund has been cut from a high of \$86

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<sup>2</sup> [Wisconsin - Outdoor Industry Association](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Knowles Nelson Stewardship – Protecting Land and Water in Wisconsin](#)



million per year down to its current level of \$33 million per year. These legacy land and water resources need buffers from suburban encroachment and investments to maintain and upgrade park facilities that are heavily used.

The League appreciates GOP leadership on 2017 WI Act 71 and 2019 WI Act 93 that made possible authorized but unobligated funds to be used to repair failing and out-of-service water infrastructure (drinking and wastewater) in state parks experiencing the highest demand. Such bipartisan leadership bodes well for passage of Stewardship reauthorization at levels beyond those supported in the last reauthorization.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.

**Background:** The cheapest energy is energy that does not need to be generated because consumers with energy efficiency projects no longer need to consume that energy. Since 2001, Focus on Energy has been Wisconsin utilities' statewide energy efficiency and renewable resource program funded by the state's investor-owned energy utilities and participating municipal and electric cooperative utilities. Every \$1 invested reaps \$5.16 in impacts that save money and invests in energy-related businesses.

Focus on Energy works with eligible Wisconsin households, farmers and businesses to install cost-effective energy efficiency and renewable energy projects that otherwise would not be completed. These efforts help residents and businesses manage rising energy costs, promote in-state economic development, and control Wisconsin's growing demand for electricity and natural gas.<sup>4</sup>

The League of Women Voters believes that energy conservation, air pollution controls of fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas), building resilience and promotion of renewable resources are necessary to protect public health and ensure a stable climate system for future generations. Individuals, communities, businesses, farmers and all levels of government have a part to play and should have access to the best available climate science.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.

Statewide beginning in 2008, more than 140 local governments plus many Tribal Governments and school districts have passed Energy Independent Community resolutions --25x25. These

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<sup>4</sup> Source: [About Us | Focus on Energy](#)

communities adopted the goal of generating at least 25 percent of their energy for local government operations (buildings, infrastructure and fleet) from renewable sources locally by 2025.<sup>5</sup> A map of these communities is available [here](#).

Beyond these communities, an increasing number of local governments and school districts are developing even more aggressive goals for sustainable, resilient communities. All these communities network to share strategies, assisted by UW and PSC staff.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.

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<sup>5</sup> [Energy Independence – Energy On Wisconsin – UW–Madison](#)

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## **PUBLIC HEALTH AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTHCARE**

### **Action Requested: Expand access to Medicaid.**

**Background:** The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin believes that every resident of our state should have access to affordable, quality health care. To this end, we advocate for full Medicaid expansion under BadgerCare. Wisconsin taxpayers have been supporting Medicaid expansion in other states for several years, and it is high time that our state government accept the available federal funding. The COVID stimulus package currently under consideration by Congress provides enhanced financial incentives for Wisconsin and the 11 other states that have currently opted not to expand Medicaid access.

#### **Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** Increasingly we have come to recognize that the health of a population is dependent on more than access to health services. Other major contributors include social factors (e.g., where people live), individual behavior (e.g., diet), and biology and genetics (e.g., inherited conditions). A broad approach to addressing the health of Wisconsin's population that includes initiatives that address the multiple determinants of health.

#### **Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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:**

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** The COVID pandemic has exposed serious inadequacies in our public health and private healthcare systems. As always, people who are inadequately insured and/or lack access to affordable healthcare services continue to suffer the most. Of course, so do those already disadvantaged by contaminated drinking water, polluted air, poor nutrition, substandard housing, and all those bedeviling “socioeconomic determinants” of health.

Progress must continue towards ensuring readily accessible, comprehensive, affordable, high quality, healthcare for everyone. Legislation can address access issues through support of targeted, healthcare training programs. Transportation to diagnostic and treatment centers should be removed as a barrier. Reproductive healthcare, supportive care for the elderly, and a broad range of services for people with disabilities must also be available. Funding mental health services on a par with other aspects of healthcare remains a priority.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**



- 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.**

**Background :** Recent data indicates that more than 575,000 family caregivers provide over \$7 million dollars in care each year. To assist these caregivers, we support a nonrefundable \$500 tax credit to help cover expenses involved in rendering this care.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** During and between pandemics, public health agencies play a key role.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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):**

**Background:** Abatement requires funding to protect infants and children from lead exposure from point and nonpoint sources, including: painted surfaces, lead contaminated drinking water, and play area soil.

**Specifically, we support requests of the Coalition on 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.

## VOTING RIGHTS

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

**Background:** Wisconsin has some of the most stringent voter registration laws in the country which disproportionately impact young people and communities of color. Automatic voter registration systems reduce barriers to voting and have been proven to be effective. Automatic registration updates would also greatly improve the accuracy of voter rolls, addressing a concern that has been raised by some and reducing the number of records impacted by the ERIC records-matching process. It also has the potential to save the state and localities significant money in each election cycle by eliminating paper-based registrations and decreasing same-day registration transactions by registering people before election day, more than compensating for the up-front costs.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** The 2020 election, conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, dramatically underscored the need to prioritize creating a healthy democracy while using an equity lens to not only increase access for the greatest number of people, but to also prioritize access for the most vulnerable.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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 process of collecting, comparing and reviewing maps developed by the Peoples Maps Commission, including holding public hearings. 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.

**Background:** Mobility is an essential right of citizens. Improved BroadBand access can improve but only partially meet this need. Today Wisconsin's economy relies almost exclusively on conventional fossil-fueled vehicles for mobility. The transportation sector in the US is responsible for the largest portion of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As electric generation moves to clean renewable sources of fuel, GHG emissions will fall. To meet clean energy goals, the state should take a lead role in electrifying all state and local government fleets and buildings, provide EV charging station infrastructure at public facilities, and incentivize EV charging stations infrastructure within the private sector – businesses, industry, agriculture, and housing.

The state should also use its budget allocations to enhance and extend the network of public multi-modal transportation options and increase access to public transit for all. Past transit funding cuts and diversion of transit eligible funds to road projects have been a disservice to workers, students and those who cannot or choose not to drive.

Roads, bridges, and freight rail are essential for businesses and farmers to get their products to market. Past disinvestment in this state and local infrastructure has made travel, whether by truck, bus or car, risky, more costly and less efficient. Fixing existing roads and bridges renews their resilience, extends the value of past tax-payer investments, and increases the safety and efficiency of the state's transportation network.

### **Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.

**Background:** Connecting all parts of the state to worldwide information is a valuable and necessary infrastructure investment. According to a 2020 Federal Communications Commission report, approximately 410,000 Wisconsin residents, including 398,000 Wisconsin residents living in rural areas (23% of rural population) do not have broadband.

These counties in the north have very low rates of access to the internet: Ashland, Sawyer, Rusk, Price, Florence, Forest, and Marinette Counties. Urban low income census tracts also have low rates of internet in households are: Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay and Racine.

A 2021 study developed by the UW-Extension shows a positive correlation between internet access with population and employment growth, and educational attainment. The downside of not having internet “. . . a lack of access to the internet and broadband could be associated with higher levels of fair to poor health and a higher number of poor mental health days . . .”  
(*Broadband and the Wisconsin Economy, January, 2021, pp 25-26*)

Wisconsin is only one of three states with significant barriers to lower cost broadband and to expansion of broadband statewide. The barriers are funding, competition, and bureaucratic. Barriers mean that even areas of the state where there is broadband, there are limits on reliability, choice and cost.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** Many Wisconsin children and communities do not currently have access to an adequate education. Many school districts are presented with the impossible dilemma of shortchanging some children and programs to meet the most urgent and pressing needs. In 2011 Wisconsin spent \$1,100 per pupil more than the United States average. Ten years later, in 2021 Wisconsin spends \$327 per pupil less than the United States average. Funding for voucher programs and independent charter schools siphon off funds from public school districts to provide funding for students in private and religious schools. The first Wisconsin voucher program, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, started in 1990 and cost about \$1 million. Currently the state spends nearly \$466 million on vouchers and independent charter schools. The legislature expanded the voucher programs in the 2015-17 budget (Act 55) without public input and has continued to do so in every budget cycle since then. Wisconsin voters have never had an official opportunity to voice their opinions of voucher programs and independent charter schools—not in a statewide referendum and not in public hearings.

**Specifically, we support initiatives to:**

- 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.**

**Background:** The Wisconsin League of Women Voters places a high priority on public education and the state support necessary to implement it. The Wisconsin Constitution provides our children with a right to an adequate education and requires the legislature to provide for that. Not only is this required by the Wisconsin Constitution, public education is a good investment of public funds.

Public schools provide many programs that private schools cannot duplicate, such as vocational training. Public school students can be prepared to go into advanced training for trades, such as plumbing, electrician, carpenter, etc. Workers skilled in the trades are badly needed in our society today, and the deficit will only get worse unless public schools are funded adequately to supply robust vocational programs in high schools and community colleges.