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WCCF Reaction to Joint Finance Budget: Dismayed by Missed Opportunities for a Better, More Balanced Approach

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is disappointed that the Joint Finance Committee did not improve the budget proposed by Gov. Walker. Like the Governor's budget, the Joint Finance version places most of the burden of closing the deficit on children and working families, employing an all-cuts approach that is certain to harm the state in the long term and is unlikely to contribute to Wisconsin's economic recovery. While Joint Finance improved on the Governor's budget in a handful of ways, such as modest reductions to the cuts in school aids and Shared Revenue, the Committee made the budget worse for children and families in many other respects.

"We are troubled by many aspects of the Joint Finance budget," said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. "We now call on members of the full Assembly and Senate to re-examine their own priorities and those of their constituents, and to revise this budget to better reflect the values Wisconsinites have long upheld. We believe in strong families and communities, excellent education systems, a healthy environment, responsive supports for struggling families, and transparent and open processes for making public policy decisions. It's not too late to reshape the budget into one that values people over corporations, prioritizes schools over unneeded highway construction, and respects families of modest means as much as it does the wealthy."

Taylor pointed to the following as examples of negative changes made to the budget by Joint Finance:

- **Medicaid power shift.** Joint Finance expanded even further the power of the Walker administration to change Medicaid laws without meaningful input from the Legislature or the public. Combined with changes in Act 10 (still hung up in court as of this writing), the bill would essentially allow DHS to dictate Medicaid policy with virtually no legislative oversight.
- **Tax breaks for the rich coupled with tax increases for the poor.** Joint Finance cut more than the Governor proposed from the state Earned Income Tax Credit, which reduces low-income households' tax bill, while giving away even more tax breaks to large corporations and the state's wealthiest residents.
- **Punitive changes to W-2.** Several changes were made to the Wisconsin Works program that will make life more difficult for some of the state's most disadvantaged families. Joint Finance reinstated the "Job Ready" classification, which allows caseworkers to deny a participant

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- benefits if she is deemed job-ready, even if she is not employed and there are very few jobs available where she lives. The Committee also significantly shortened the amount of time a mother of a newborn infant can receive benefits while staying home to care for her child.
- **Roads over schools.** Joint Finance approved the Governor's strategy of de-funding public school education, vocational training and higher education while plowing vast amounts of our limited resources into highways. And the Finance Committee went even further than the Governor in enabling private schools to siphon funding away from public schools, even as the public schools are facing deep cuts. Investing in our transportation infrastructure is important, but not at the expense of our most important components of human infrastructure, such as education.

"Rationalizing these moves by claiming that 'we're broke' is not acceptable," said Taylor. "The fact is that there are better choices for balancing the budget. We need a balanced approach that provides enough revenue to protect the things that make Wisconsin great while still allowing for cuts to make ends meet. Refusing to consider these options is a mistake for which Wisconsin's children and families could end up paying the price for years to come."

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