



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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TO: Joint Finance Committee

FR: Charity Eleson, Executive Director

RE: Budget Papers # 431 & 432: Foster Care Rates (DHFS)
Family Foundations Home Visiting (DHFS)

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) supports increasing foster care rates consistent with **Alternative 1 of paper #431** on Foster Care Rates. WCCF also supports the Governor's proposal for supporting a new universal home visiting program, as well as an increase in targeted home visiting consistent with **Alternative 1 of paper #432** on Family Foundations Home Visiting Program.

Foster Care Rates: Paper #431

The current rates Wisconsin pays to foster families are the lowest in the Midwest. WCCF recommends a 5 percent increase in each year of the biennium to narrow the gap between Wisconsin's foster care rates and those of our neighboring states. Even with this proposed increase, Wisconsin will be significantly lower than the national average for foster care rates.

Foster parents provide a significant service to Wisconsin's children and communities. The strength of our foster care system rests in being able to recruit well-qualified families in every region of the state to ensure that children have a safe place to live during the time when their parents are not able to provide a safe home. By increasing foster care rates, we can improve the ability of families to provide foster care for our children in need. WCCF urges the committee to adopt **Alternative 1 of paper #431** to raise foster care rates 5 percent in each year of the biennium.

Family Foundations: Paper #432

Recent studies have found that universal home visiting programs have positive effects for families, while also saving taxpayer dollars. Savings have been documented from decreases in child abuse and neglect investigations and out-of-home placements through these programs. Identifying at-risk families has the added benefit of being able to provide services before families reach a crisis. Home visitation of all first-time parents would increase the awareness of the importance of positive interactions for healthy child development. By providing families with this service, we can give Wisconsin kids the best chance to be healthy and ready to learn. WCCF recommends adoption of **Alternative 1 of paper #432** on Family Foundations Home Visiting Program.