



Transcript of testimony given at the Joint Committee on Finance public hearing on the Governor's 2015-17 Biennial Budget (Assembly Bill 20/Senate Bill 20) on Friday, March 20, 2015 at Alverno College.

The League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County is a non-partisan organization which encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Our comments on the budget are focused on a few non-partisan policy positions which speak to our quality of life and in support of programs which benefit all the citizens of our state.

We support Maintaining Strong Citizen Input and Government Oversight

There are checks and balances in place to protect citizens from political swings in government. Often non-fiscal budget policies threaten to change the fundamental relationships between people and our government. That is why we oppose the loss of independence of the Judicial Commission by putting it under the control of the State Supreme Court. For the same reason we strongly oppose the weakening of the citizen-based Natural Resources Board by removing its rule-making authority. Why would we want to limit public input and oversight?

We Support an Educated Public

The League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County is greatly concerned about the lack of financial support for education affecting K-12 grades and now the University of Wisconsin system. Education for all of our children and youth has been a cornerstone of the Wisconsin tradition. We know it crucial to developing a good standard of living for all levels of society. Funding for education is an investment in the future and the future well-being of all of our citizens. This budget needs to make that investment.

This year's budget contains a significant cut to the University of Wisconsin System. Interestingly, the system handles about 180,000 students throughout its various facilities and awards about 36,000 degrees a year. But this proposed budget now spends 17% more from general funds on Corrections, than it does on the University System. The League believes our education priorities are seriously out of balance.

We Support a Healthy Population

We urge you not to make Medicare Part D a prerequisite for Senior Care. This is an additional cost to already stressed low income families.

Family care is a long-term alternative that would be cut by \$6 million. The proposed budget would also move oversight from the Dept. of Health Services, a social agency to the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance, a business model and it eliminates Aging & Disability Resource Center boards and councils. Is this how we in Wisconsin want to treat our frail and elderly? Badger Care is a successful program. And we continue to urge Governor Walker to accept the federal money available to expand Medicaid, which would improve the prospects for this biennial budget.

We Support Public Transit

Public transit is a small part of the transportation budget, but it makes a huge difference for people who rely on public transit to get to jobs, interviews, work, child care, government agencies, shopping, medical appointments and other daily business. A modern, efficient system of public transit will help grow Wisconsin's economy, because it attracts young professionals to our communities and helps prevent air pollution and traffic congestion. We urge you to keep public transit as an integral component of the Transportation Fund. In addition, we call for a more balanced use of transportation dollars to include more for public transit and local roads and less for unnecessary huge highway projects.

We urge you to maintain the institutions and programs that have served Wisconsinites well for decades. Do not use this budget to dismantle or weaken the watchdog agencies and citizen boards that hold government accountable to us, the citizens of our state.

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