

# Eloise Anderson: Ending the child care cliff helps families and rewards work

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During his budget address, Governor Walker offered a new, exciting vision for how Wisconsin can once again lead the nation in reforming our public assistance programs. Building off of the reforms former Governor Tommy Thompson started in 1996, Gov. Walker has proposed a series of initiatives that reward work and help people move from government dependence to true independence.

The Governor's common sense reforms are based on the principal that no government program should ever be designed in a way to serve as a disincentive for people to take a promotion or accept a higher paying job. Yet today, too many hard working parents in Wisconsin are faced with a horrible dilemma; turn down an opportunity to advance their career and better support their family, or lose the ability to pay for child care.

Under current Wisconsin Shares eligibility rules working parents are eligible for the subsidy if they make less than 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and may continue to receive the subsidy up to 200% FPL. But if they earn one penny over 200% they hit the child care cliff and instantly become ineligible, disrupting their children's early childhood education and throwing their family into financial turmoil.

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High quality, stable early learning experiences lay the foundation for a child's success in school. Research shows that the vast majority of a person's brain

development takes place during the first five years of life. For Wisconsin to have the workforce we need to continue to grow our economy well into the future, we need to be sure all our children have access to high quality child care. Eliminating the child care cliff is an important step in the right direction.

Gov. Walker's proposal rewards parents for their hard work and makes a powerful investment in Wisconsin's children. By ensuring that parents receiving Wisconsin Shares can continue to afford high quality child care as they move up the career ladder, he is also ensuring that our government assistance programs never keep a family trapped in a cycle of dependence.

— *Anderson is secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families*