

# Milwaukee County Exec. Chris Abele: County programs support economic, community development

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin – As the community continues its discussion on Milwaukee County's budget, County Executive Chris Abele is highlighting the importance of County programs and services that are at risk of being cut by the County Board of Supervisors. Earlier this month, Board Chairman Theo Lipscomb directed County leaders to identify budget cuts totaling more than \$20 million, which would include service cuts, layoffs, worker concessions, and other austerity measures.

Several successful programs in the Department of Administrative Services could be on the chopping block, including the County designed and funded UpLift MKE workforce development initiative. The County could also see cuts to its efforts to partner with woman and minority-owned businesses.

Since launching formally at the beginning of 2016, the UpLift MKE program has placed more than 300 people in jobs averaging about \$15 per hour with a nearly 100 percent job retention rate.

These results are phenomenal and that is because UpLift MKE is unique. Our job training and placement efforts are targeted directly to workers, particularly those in and near the Sherman Park area, who most need support to successfully climb the

ladder of opportunity. The program is going so well that in September it was recognized with a Human Capital award from the Wisconsin Economic Development Association. As well, due to the program's effectiveness to date, the county executive added funding for UpLift MKE to his proposed budget for the third year in a row. This funding is not statutorily required and is on the list of cuts Chairman Lipscomb requested. Neither the county executive nor county department heads asked for or recommend these service cuts.

"Quality programs and services that empower our workforce, level the playing field for women and minority-owned businesses, and provide capacity support for aspiring entrepreneurs are critical to our efforts to address racial disparities in Milwaukee County and expand economic opportunity for all," County Executive Chris Abele said. "This could all be at risk. While I wish we could support every program at the County without new revenue that is simply not reality. I urge supervisors to consider the ramifications of slashing \$20 million or more from my budget proposal."

In the Community Business Development Partners department, the County's efforts to certify and support Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Small Business Enterprise (SBE) firms could also be at risk, despite the need for these services in the community.

The mission of the Community Business Development Partners department (CBDP) is to increase the overall economic viability of small and disadvantaged businesses throughout Milwaukee County, and the region. The department helps set participation goals to ensure meaningful opportunity and representation for DBE firms interested in contracting with Milwaukee County, certifies firms qualified to participate in the DBE program, monitors and enforces compliance of contracts with project specifications, and promotes business opportunities and capacity building measures to small businesses.

The department also actively promotes greater utilization of small businesses in County projects and participates in small business development and technical assistance initiatives to qualifying DBEs actively working on County contracts. This work increases the overall economic viability of targeted, small and disadvantaged businesses throughout Milwaukee County, and the region. Earlier this year, Milwaukee County CBDP was recognized as the 2017 Strategic Partner of the Year by The Business Council.

The Milwaukee region has a tremendous amount of talent, potential, and opportunity waiting to be developed. Cutting our capacity to support small businesses and minority and women-owned businesses at this critical juncture, with half a billion dollars in planned economic development in the Park East and projects like the Couture and Ikea underway in all corners of the County, is unbelievably short-sighted.

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