

League of Women Voters Wisconsin: Statement on January 2018 Special Session on welfare reform bills

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The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin agrees with Governor Walker that employment in jobs that pay a living wage is the most effective means for families to move out of poverty and become vital, contributing members of society. However the majority of people in Wisconsin who continue to receive FoodShare and other government benefits are people who already face substantial barriers to improved employment: many have disabilities that limit their options; they may be single mothers with children and inadequate access to good child care; they have chronic or acute health concerns that require frequent—perhaps daily—treatment regimens; they lack access to good transportation to travel to work or to daycare or to medical appointments; they lack modern skills to meet employers' technical requirements; they live in constant fear of domestic violence and sabotage of their employment prospects.

Increasing the bureaucratic compliance requirements is not the most humane, and certainly not the most efficient, way to help people train for and compete successfully for good jobs.

While some of these bills propose changes to our existing systems that may help a small percentage of low-income individuals, they largely do not provide the types of assistance that would result in meaningful change. Unfortunately, these proposals are mostly about increasing the barriers faced by struggling families which, we know, will simply result in fewer resources for the families involved.

Instead of increasing barriers to accessing assistance, the League encourages the legislature to develop proposals that will: help families with their transportation problems; provide good, neighborhood child care that is available at the times, which is needed by the erratic schedules employees are now required to work; ensure that people are receiving needed medical care; expand training opportunities for the modern job market; and provide that available jobs pay a family-sustaining wage.

Unemployment in Wisconsin is approaching historically low levels. Employers and the government will have to work together to expand the labor force to meet the increasing demand for skilled employees. This cannot be done by making it harder for low-wage workers to access supplements to their low wages. It can only be done by expanding the opportunities for families to participate in the modern labor market. We encourage the legislature to take a new look at how to make it possible for more people to meaningfully participate in building Wisconsin's economy.

As they stand, these proposals will not help the state move forward, and we urge you to reject them.

Thank you for your consideration.