

ACLU: Advocacy groups stress importance of public input during press conference at state budget hearing

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WHITEWATER — Representatives from ACLU of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Public Education Network, Coalition for a Just Budget, Building Unity, WEAC, and other groups held a press conference today outside the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) hearing at Whitewater, emphasizing the importance of public input during the 2021-2023 biennial budget process and highlighted the need for the budget to reflect the needs and values of Wisconsinites.

The JFC typically holds multiple hearings around the state. The first of three in-person events was held in Whitewater today, with other events planned later this month in Rhinelander on April 21 and Menomonie on April 22. A virtual event is also planned for April 29.

“This cycle’s format is going to require Wisconsinites from populated areas of the state, including Milwaukee and Madison, to drive hours or hope they are able to get a slot to participate virtually to participate in a process in which their voice should be an integral part of the process,” said Molly Collins, Advocacy Director of the ACLU of Wisconsin. “It is far from ideal, and doesn’t give people the voice they’ve had in the process in years past.”

“How we choose to spend our money reflects our values,” said Sean Wilson, Smart Justice Campaign Manager of the ACLU of Wisconsin. “For decades in Wisconsin, we’ve spent billions of dollars on systems of mass incarceration that don’t make our communities safer. This budget invests more in programming, mental health and substance abuse treatment, diversion, and reentry, trying to set people up for success post-conviction. Those choices will help us spend less on locking people in cages in the future.”

“State budgets matter deeply to our children and their public schools,” said Heather DuBois Bourenane, Executive Director of Wisconsin Public Education Network. “We urge everyone who cares about closing the gaps for Wisconsin kids to share their concerns and priorities with members of the Joint Finance Committee and their own lawmakers. Our kids are counting on us to make sure they get back to school next fall with the resources and support they need to thrive. This means increasing support for students with disabilities, meeting mental health needs, and increasing funding equitably so every child succeeds.”