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Gov. Evers: Highlights initiatives to support working families, strengthen State's workforce, maintain economy's momentum

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers this week will travel across the state highlighting initiatives included in his 2023-25 biennial budget to support working families, strengthen the state's workforce, and maintain the economy's momentum, such as creating a 12-week paid family and medical leave program, investing in child care for working families, and building the 21st-century workforce and infrastructure Wisconsin needs.

"While we have made significant investments to bolster our state's workforce and economy—and are seeing the results of those efforts pay off—we know that many businesses are still struggling to find and keep workers to meet their demand and that barriers like access to quality, affordable child care continue to hold families back," said Gov. Evers. "That's why we proposed a budget that addresses these challenges and sets our state up for long-term success by tackling the root causes of some of our state's long-standing workforce needs, like ensuring folks have the support, resources, and training to thrive in our state's most in-demand fields and eliminating barriers that keep families from fully participating in the workforce."

Over the last four years, unemployment has hit record lows, the state has seen the highest number of people employed ever, and Wisconsin continues to see an unemployment rate below the national average and a labor participation rate above the national average. Last month, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development reported that for the month of February, Wisconsin's unemployment rate dropped to a record low of 2.7 percent. In addition, total seasonally adjusted

nonfarm jobs increased by 7,500 over the month of February and 50,300 year-over-year to hit a new record high of 2,997,400. The total jobs number puts the state at 3,400 jobs above pre-COVID-19 peaks.

Gov. Evers' 2023-25 budget invests in continuing the economy's momentum with several comprehensive initiatives to support working families and strengthen the state's workforce. A full breakdown of the governor's plans to grow Wisconsin's workforce, invest in a robust economy, and ensure that every family has the support and resources to be successful is available below.

Creating a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program
Gov. Evers is proposing creating a first-of-its-kind Wisconsin Paid Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Program administered by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

Under the paid FMLA Program, workers will be eligible for 12 weeks of leave beginning Jan. 1, 2025. This program will be self-sustaining by 2026, and benefits will be funded through payroll contributions shared equally by an employer and an employee, much like the current Unemployment Insurance system. In order to launch the program expeditiously, the governor's budget infuses the new benefit and administration trust fund with a transfer of $243.4 million.

According to a 2022 Marquette University Law Poll, 73 percent of Wisconsin voters favor requiring businesses to provide paid leave for new parents.

The governor's proposal also expands eligibility for workers to use family and medical leave, paid or not, to include deployment of a spouse or child and an unforeseen or unexpected closure of a school or child carefacility, among other modifications.

Bolstering Child Care Statewide
Gov. Evers is proposing significant investments in Wisconsin's child care industry and workforce, including strategies that create opportunities for new programs, encourage development for prospective care provider employees, support existing providers, and encourage employers to partner with care providers. The governor is proposing: Providing $302 million general purpose revenue (GPR) and $38 million Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/ Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funding to permanently establish the Child Care Counts Program, allowing for continued benefits across the state; Investing more than $22

million over the biennium in the innovative “Partner Up!” Program to support partnerships between businesses who purchase child care slots for their employees and child care providers and supporting retention, recruitment, and career development for potential providers; Easing the financial burden on families, supporting excellent early childhood resources for children while bolstering the workforce by expanding the Child and Dependent Care Credit, providing nearly $30 million in relief to an estimated 107,000 Wisconsinites; Allocating $124.7 million TANF over the biennium to migrate Wisconsin Shares to a full-time/part-time model for calculating subsidies to align with federal child care requirements, including waiving copays for Wisconsin families under 100 percent of the federal poverty level; Providing $10 million TANF over the biennium for the New Provider grant program, which provides grants to newly certified or licensed child care providers, with $500,000 set aside to fund newly certified and licensed providers in Tribal areas; Investing $1.6 million all funds over the biennium into a new quality early childhood education center in Milwaukee, continuing funding for child care programming in financially disadvantaged areas within the city of Milwaukee, and providing $875,000 TANF over the biennium to Tribal child care contracts to support recruitment, retention, and expansion of child care providers in Tribal areas; Supporting programs with a proven track record of supporting children’s academic and social-emotional well-being with $1 million TANF over the biennium to Boys and Girls Clubs for their Wisconsin After 3 program and $2.6 million GPR over the biennium support for their youth mental health and substance use prevention efforts; Investing $3.29 million over the biennium in social-emotional training and technical assistance in child care settings with the goal of reducing instances of children being removed from daycare for behavioral issues; Providing $600,000 TANF over the biennium for a $10,000 income disregard for direct care workers applying for Wisconsin Shares Benefits; and Migrating the child care provider licensing application process to an online platform with $1.42 million over the biennium. **Strengthening Wisconsin’s Workforce**The governor’s biennial budget includes a $200 million investment to continue the successful Workforce Innovation Grant Program to provide long-term solutions for businesses to find workers and individuals to obtain family-supporting jobs with a specific focus of $100 million to bolster the state’s healthcare workforce.

In addition to the governor’s $200 million investment in the Workforce Innovation Grant Program, he is also proposing: $12 million for job training initiatives through the Worker Advancement Initiative; $4.5 million for outreach to populations

disconnected from the labor force through a new Reengaging Out-of-Work Barriered and Underserved Individuals Through System Transformation (ROBUST) Program; $8.8 million for enhanced youth service programs conducted by local workforce development boards; A $5 million annual increase in talent attraction and retention efforts at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC); Nearly $900,000 for job centers within correctional institutions; $1.7 million to expand the Transitional Jobs and Transform Milwaukee Jobs Programs;$10 million to invest in Wisconsin's future workforce and future clean energy economy by providing clean energy job training and reemployment programs;More than $50 million to address the healthcare workforce shortage, including recruitment, education and training, and retention efforts across the state and especially in rural communities; and More than $16 million over the biennium to address the teacher shortage plaguing schools across the state, including funding for "grow your own" initiatives and incentives for student teachers. An online version of this release is available here.