

Raising Wisconsin: JFC fails children, families after making nearly zero investment in health and well-being initiatives

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MADISON, WIS. – Raising Wisconsin is disappointed by members of the state Joint Committee on Finance (JFC)'s decision not to fund critical child health and well-being initiatives in the 2023-25 state budget.

JFC members failed to extend Medicaid coverage for new mothers to 12 months in the postpartum period after deliberation on the Department of Health Services budget June 15-16. Raising Wisconsin advocated for the change as one of its key legislative priorities, particularly because of the state's continued maternal and infant health crisis of unacceptable and disproportionately high infant mortality rates for babies of color. An extension also would help mitigate the societal costs of premature and low birth weight babies.

"Wisconsin lawmakers' decision to turn a blind eye to the maternal health crisis in our state, which is disproportionately killing Black mothers and infants, is a shameful act of callous negligence," stated William Parke-Sutherland, senior health policy analyst for Kids Forward.

JFC members also didn't allocate any funding for the expansion of the Family Foundations Home Visiting (FFHV) Program. Raising Wisconsin advocated for \$5.2 million for FFHV to increase the number of families and counties served. In the long-term, home visiting has been proven to foster educational development, assist with school-readiness and play a role in preventing child abuse and neglect.

“Evidence-based home-visiting programs play an important role in supporting Wisconsin families and improving maternal and child health outcomes. They also promote the economic stability of families and have a strong return on investment, saving the state money in the long run,” said Megan Adamczewski, Midwest government affairs manager for the National Service Office for Nurse-Family Partnership and Child First. “There is a great need for home-visiting programs across Wisconsin communities, and we strongly urge legislators to provide much-needed funding.”

The committee allocated a mere \$535,000 to social emotional learning. Raising Wisconsin has been advocating for \$8.79 million to support and enhance training and coaching, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) and endorsement work. When left untreated, mental health challenges can take root early, worsen over time and prompt potentially serious consequences for early learning and social competence, including challenging behaviors and lifelong health.

“Critical funding for infant and early childhood mental health supports was denied at a time when our young children are suffering – when the rate of aggressive behaviors, anxiety and other mental health conditions has significantly increased,” said Lana Shklyar Nenide, executive director of Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health. “This decision will result in a loss of services for young children and their caregivers during a time of especially high need.”