

Rep. Vining on State Budget Vote: A budget is a time to drop a plumb line

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MADISON—The Wisconsin State Assembly voted on the 2023-2025 biennial state budget that was crafted by the Republican-controlled Joint Committee on Finance. Representative Robyn Vining (D-Wauwatosa) released the following statement:

“The biennial state budget is an important time to drop a plumb line, it’s an important time to see if we are building a strong and sustainable future for the Wisconsin people and the generations to come. I’ve evaluated this budget on that plumb line—I’ve looked as someone who values fairness and justice and I’ve realized that for over a decade, the way this state spends money has tilted away from what is good and true and right, and that bend isn’t getting better—with this budget, it is far worse.

“This budget defunds public schools and shifts state funding to unaccountable voucher schools that operate without transparency and accountability. Every Wisconsin child has a constitutional right to a well-funded and world class public education. This right has been hacked away at over and over and over again since 2011, and I believe there is dishonesty in how public education funding is being presented. Republicans are claiming historic investments while not keeping up with inflation, but if you do not keep up with inflation—that’s a cut. Further, the People of Wisconsin have been told for a decade that the reason the schools can’t be funded is because there isn’t enough money—it’s clear now that wasn’t true. This budget defunds the UW system, which has the best return on investment in the entire budget. When we invest in the UW system, we invest in our economy, workforce, and people—Republicans failed to fund one of our strongest economic engines in Wisconsin.

“There is a very important and positive inclusion in this budget and it is the \$30

million investment in mental health funding for our schools. Governor Evers declared 2023 the 'Year of Mental Health' and negotiated this funding as part of the shared revenue deal. I commend Governor Evers for this funding, and what it will mean for so many of Wisconsin's students. Thank you, Governor Evers!

"This budget fails to address maternal healthcare. I do not understand how or why the Assembly, a body with the votes to pass Medicaid expansion for postpartum healthcare, will not pass this bill, and knowing that the budget was our only shot to get this passed due to the Speaker's refusal to pass a standalone bill, rejected that shot on the floor today. I'm honestly at a deep and total loss at how this body can watch Wisconsin women lose the constitutional right to the full spectrum of healthcare, watch an archaic 1849 law go back into effect—a law that endangers the health of pregnant people across this state—force women into pregnancy no matter how traumatizing or dangerous or unaffordable it is for them and their families, and then leave them without the healthcare to recover from childbirth.

"This budget fails to fund Child Care Counts, just as we are staring down a childcare cliff. We are looking at estimates of 25% of childcare centers closing, and rates going up an average of \$50, per child, per week. And looking at history, we know that losing access to childcare disproportionately affects women. Wisconsin women deserve better! I have heard from constituents across my district deep concern as they stare down the childcare cliff. Child Care Counts funding is important because once we go off the cliff, it's going to be very hard—maybe even impossible—to rebuild childcare infrastructure. I also heard concern from people that the increase of \$50 a week could make them very possibly unable to afford both increased childcare costs, and food. Is this how kids end up hungry? Legislatures see an incoming problem and instead of avoiding or solving it, they offer a tax cut for the wealthiest and leave other families choosing between affording two critical needs?

"This budget also sets the table for future cuts to public transportation by moving mass transit funding to GPR. We know that with this change, cuts are much easier in future budgets, and mass transit will be pitted against other items competing for General Purpose Revenue. My concern is that rather than protecting the vulnerable, Republicans are making the vulnerable more vulnerable to future cuts—Republicans are restructuring the system so that in the next budget cycle, they can cut mass transit even more. We see what they are doing, we see how vulnerable this makes already vulnerable Wisconsinites, and I object. I am very concerned about what this means for mass transit funding in the future.

“When I drop the plumb line and I look at this budget, I am left with this: my heart breaks for every child that deserves the constitutional right to a well-funded public education, and for the hungry kids. My heart breaks for the UW system of schools, and the loss of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives—because we are stronger, better people when we value each other and our differences. My heart breaks for women who need maternal healthcare and won’t have it when they need it most. And my heart breaks for the families on the childcare cliff who will soon have to take on a new set of financial stress. We had *so much opportunity* with this budget. We had so many options, and so many people counting on us. And in the end, with a \$7B surplus, we failed to do what is best for the People of Wisconsin. It is our charge to move forward, *together*, and I do dare worry that didn’t happen today.”