

# WAFCA: Supports a state budget that improves the continuum of supports for children and families

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Upon the release of Governor Evers' 2023-25 biennial budget plan, the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA) expressed support for proposals to grow Wisconsin's commitment to stronger services and supports across our systems of care that impact children and families. "This budget is an opportunity to say "yes" to a both/and strategy for tackling the issues before us," stated WAFCA Executive Director, Kathy Markeland. "It's important to set priorities and sustain our commitment to effective, efficient services and we also need to use this moment to pivot our investments toward the kind of prevention and early intervention supports that will deliver long-term dividends for Wisconsin."

In addition to emphasizing the value of investment in basic needs such as workforce housing, high quality childcare, EITC and extension of Medicaid postpartum coverage, WAFCA highlighted the ways in which the current budget surplus presents an opportunity to strengthen the state's commitment to more equitably funding the continuum of supports for Wisconsin's families including:

- Continuing to expand preventative services: Research has shown that as states increase their investment in economic supports for families, child welfare system referrals are reduced. Wisconsin can go further, faster in supporting our families by committing sustainable funding to evidence-based programs like family resources centers, home visiting services and school-based mental health initiatives that improve community connectedness and normalize help-seeking for our students and their families.
- Focusing on our children with complex needs: We lack sufficient provider capacity in our continuum of care for families – from mentors to peer

specialists to therapists to foster care to respite and residential services – we simply don't have the workforce, nor efficient and sufficient funding streams to help our families access the right service at the right time. Proposed funding for kin and foster care, youth crisis stabilization, intensive family preservation, residential treatment programs, and full funding for Medicaid crisis and community support program services will help to realign resources to ensure that individuals, parents and children can access support where they live, whether in a rural or urban community.

- Growing a future workforce to support mental health and wellbeing: The current mental health crisis is also an opportunity to expand career pathways for a wider array of caregivers and helping professions and to recognize their critical contribution to the wellbeing of our children and families. This includes expanding Medicaid reimbursement for peer specialists, increasing support for qualified treatment trainees, and delivering sustainable Medicaid payment rates for our human services sector that primarily provides critical mental health and substance use treatment services to our Medicaid eligible populations.

The current state budget is an opportunity to recommit to fair financing of the vital supports provided through counties and our schools. It is also a chance to fund the pivot to more preventative, cost-effective services. Doing so will help our behavioral health, child welfare and human services sector more rapidly respond to the demand for community-based, in-home services while sustaining capacity for more intensive services, like residential treatment.

“WAFCA members stand at the intersection of the public/private partnership, and daily demonstrate the capacity of our mission-driven human services organizations – powered by our compassionate workforce to directly impact the health and well-being of our communities. We look forward to productive dialogue with policy makers in coming months as we seek to build on our common values and shared commitment to healthier, stronger families.”