



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 7, 2021

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Legislature Guts Governor's Budget on Party-Line Vote

The following is a statement from Kids Forward CEO Michele Mackey regarding the votes that stripped all items from the proposed budget.

Deep and persistent racial disparities have been holding Wisconsin and all Wisconsinites back. The pandemic and other events of the past year have exposed the depth of those disparities and the imperative to eliminate them. The Governor proposed a budget that made much-needed investments in the fundamental building blocks of Wisconsin's growth and future prosperity - our children, families, schools, health, and equitable communities.

Without having time to review, let alone seriously consider the public input from thousands of people all over Wisconsin, the legislature's Joint Finance Committee voted strictly on party lines to throw out nearly 400 items in the Governor's proposed budget, including expanding BadgerCare, juvenile justice reforms, and increasing access to broadband. Then they doubled down and removed *everything else* that was in the governor's budget, thereby taking the proposed budget back to what the legislature passed in 2019. Unless the committee reconsiders a number of the provisions they removed today, they will completely ignore what has happened over the past tumultuous year and squander an opportunity to invest in a more equitable future for all.

We are hopeful the legislature may address some of these issues with separate legislation, such as expanding BadgerCare and returning 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system, or later in the budget process. But we are greatly disappointed that the committee missed an opportunity this week to reach across partisan divides and build a budget that responds to many of the most pressing needs facing Wisconsin children, families, and communities.

Regardless of where we go from here, one thing is certain: The legislature will have a much harder time funding its priorities after preserving inequitable tax breaks that benefit the wealthy and well-connected and rejecting the \$1.6 billion that could be saved by expanding access to health insurance through BadgerCare. The people of Wisconsin deserve better.

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Kids Forward advocates for effective, long-lasting solutions that break down barriers to success for children and families in Wisconsin. Using research and a community-informed approach, Kids Forward works to help every kid, every family, and every community thrive.