

February 18, 2021

To: The Joint Finance Committee

Cc: Governor Evers, Senate Majority Leader LeMahieu, Senate Minority Leader Bewley, Speaker Vos, Assembly Minority Leader Hintz, Members of the Legislature

Dear Co-Chairs Marklein and Born,

The state budget process is one of the most important policy discussions that legislators, the Governor's staff, and advocacy groups engage in together. At the heart of the state budget is the belief that our state's values are reflected in the decisions that are made about how we spend our state's tax dollars. But, it is also true that robust public engagement in making these decisions is a value in and of itself. As advocacy organizations representing various issues, geographic reach, and constituency bases, it is essential that we reach out to you as the Co-Chairs of the Joint Finance Committee to offer our support for making the 2021-2022 State Budget hearings be as productive and inclusive as possible. While we represent far ranging and diverse populations, we are united in wanting to make sure that every person who wants to participate in the JFC hearings, and other legislative hearings this session, can do so safely.

Because of the known risks with large public gatherings due to Covid-19 and the uncertainty about when it will be safe for all members of the public to attend, we as member-based organizations cannot in good conscience encourage our members to risk their health to attend large public hearings. Many of our members are at higher risk of developing life-threatening health issues due to age or underlying health conditions. Some of our members are from communities that have been especially hard hit by the COVID pandemic, such as people of color, who are at higher risk for adverse outcomes from a COVID infection. In addition, there is concern that not adequately following public health guidance for large public gatherings will further strain our health care system, which we all benefit in keeping COVID care from overwhelming.

The below signed advocacy groups are asking you, in your discretion as chairs, to make the following virtual and remote options available for public testimony to the JFC committee and ability to formally register their positions on the state budget:

- Establish an e-mail address for the Joint Finance Committee expressly for collecting testimony for inclusion into the public record.
- Establish an online version of the hearing slip that can be used anywhere in the state by constituents to register their position on the budget similar to what they could fill out if they attended in person.
- Develop clear, consistent language and instructions for the public on how they may register and submit testimony remotely. We suggest these instructions are included as part of every public hearing notice.

- Allow use of virtual platforms for remote testimony. Many platforms allow registration in advance and uploading of files which may be useful features for legislative committees. State agencies have used these platforms for gathering public input and comment during the pandemic.
- Consider providing a limited (by registration) call-in option for individuals to provide remote testimony if they do not have access to the internet, do not have a computer or have poor broadband.
- Ensure there are clear guidelines and notices posted online and in other places to help people understand all testimony options.
- Coordinate with state expertise (such as the Department of Health Services media team) to maximize accessibility for constituents with sensory disabilities on virtual platforms.
- Partner with Wisconsin Eye to provide captioning and ASL interpreters for hearing impaired individuals for all public hearings using this service.

The below signed groups and our members wish to support a state budget process that welcomes the voices and experience of all people in Wisconsin during this critical time. We believe these suggestions will help you and other members of the committee run a state budget hearing process that we can all be proud of together.

Sincerely,

1000 Friends of Wisconsin
 350 Madison
 A Better Wisconsin Together
 AARP Wisconsin
 ACLU of Wisconsin
 African American Roundtable, Inc.
 AFSCME Council 32
 All Voting Is Local
 Alliance for the Great Lakes
 Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin
 Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin
 Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin
 Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC)
 Black Lives Matter to Wisconsin Unitarian Universalists
 Blue Sky Waukesha
 Central Wisconsin ADAPT
 Chippewa Valley Transit Alliance, Inc.
 Citizen Action of Wisconsin
 Citizen Advocates for Public Education
 Clean Wisconsin
 Coalition For Justice
 Common Cause Wisconsin
 Consumer Direct Care Network

Crawford Stewardship Project
Disability Rights Wisconsin
Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa
End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin
Esther
Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing (EXPO)
Fair Wisconsin
First Baptist Church of Madison
For Our Future Wisconsin
Harambee Village Doulas
Interfaith Earth Network
Kids Forward
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
LOV Inc, Living Our Visions Inclusively
Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin
Madtown Mommas and Disability Advocates
Main Street Alliance
Metcalf Park Community Bridges, Inc.
Midwest Environmental Advocates
Milwaukee Branch NAACP
Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission
Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAHA)
Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Milwaukee Turners
Milwaukee Zen Center
Monona UMC
NAACP Milwaukee Branch
NASW WI
Northern Wisconsin NORML
People First Wisconsin
People of Progression
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin
Progress North
Protect Our Care Wisconsin
RENEW Wisconsin
Rid Racism Milwaukee
River Alliance of Wisconsin
Schools and Communities United
Sierra Club Wisconsin
Souled Out Ministries INC
SOULS
Souls To The Polls
Southeastern Wisconsin ADAPT

Survival Coalition of WI Disability Advocacy Organizations
The Arc Greater Columbia County
The Arc Wisconsin
The Arc-Dane County
UFCW Local 1473
Waupaca County ARC Inc.
WI Association of Family & Children's Agencies
WI Board for People with Developmental Disabilities
WI Conference NAACP
WI Early Childhood Association
Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network
Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools
Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers, Inc.
Wisconsin Conservation Voters
Wisconsin Council of Churches
Wisconsin Democracy Campaign
Wisconsin Education Association Council
Wisconsin Environment
Wisconsin Environmental Health Network
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS)
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin Green Muslims
Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action
Wisconsin Interfaith Power and Light
Wisconsin Justice Initiative
Wisconsin Lakes
Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association
Wisconsin Long Term Care Workforce Alliance
Wisconsin Muslim Civic Alliance
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association
Wisconsin Public Education Network
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
Wisconsin's Green Fire
WISPIRG
Youth Justice Milwaukee