



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL DELIVERY

September 12, 2023

Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature:

Last month, I announced a special session of the Wisconsin State Legislature to occur next week at 12 p.m. on Wed., Sept. 20, 2023, for the Legislature to complete its work on the 2023-25 biennial budget by passing my comprehensive plan, LRB-4085/LRB-4086, to address our state's longstanding, generational workforce challenges.

As many of you have both publicly and privately acknowledged, our state has long experienced a shrinking labor pool due to several long-term factors that, coupled with our state's current historically low unemployment and high workforce participation, are causing Wisconsin's small businesses, farmers and producers, hospitals and healthcare sectors, and schools, among other critical employers and industries, to face significant challenges filling available jobs.

In response to these challenges, and in the absence of the Legislature approving critical investments I requested in my proposed 2023-25 biennial budget, I released yet another comprehensive plan, LRB-4085/LRB-4086, to meaningfully address our state's generational workforce challenges with a \$1 billion investment of our state's readily available \$4 billion budget surplus, including:

- Providing more than \$340 million, including \$38.9 million in Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) funds, for the Child Care Counts Program that to date has helped more than 4,440 child care providers keep their doors open, ensuring the employment of 22,000 child care professionals and allowing providers to continue to provide high-quality care to more than 113,000 kids;
- Investing \$22.3 million for the Partner Up! Program, which has helped support employers in purchasing child care spots for their employees at existing regulated child care providers across the state. A portion of this investment redirects the \$15 million that the 2023-25 budget placed in the Joint Finance Committee supplemental appropriation for the purposes of grants to child care providers;
- Creating a first-of-its-kind Wisconsin Paid Family and Medical Leave Act Program to ensure workers are eligible for 12 weeks of paid leave beginning Jan. 1, 2025;
- Expanding eligibility for workers to use family and medical leave, paid or not, to include deployment of a spouse or child and an unforeseen or unexpected closure of a school or child care facility, among other modifications;
- Bolstering higher education and workforce training statewide by investing more than \$320 million in the University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Technical College Systems, including \$17.3 million over the biennium for the Wisconsin Grants program, which provides college students with need-based financial aid;
- Directing \$100 million to continue the successful Workforce Innovation Grant Program to provide grants to regional organizations to design and implement plans to address their region's healthcare-related workforce challenges; and
- Targeting \$75 million to help strengthen high-need areas of our state's workforce, especially in the healthcare and education sectors, to support healthcare workers and Wisconsin's educator pipeline.

There is broad public consensus and acknowledgment that Wisconsin's shrinking labor force is one of the single greatest challenges facing our state. Additionally, in my private conversations with legislators on both sides of the aisle, members have expressed the need for real, meaningful solutions to our state's workforce challenges, including efforts to prevent the collapse of our state's child care industry. These facts are among the several reasons why I was surprised Republican leaders Speaker Robin Vos and Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu not only immediately pledged to oppose my comprehensive plan to address our state's workforce challenges but cited no real rationale or basis for their opposition on the merits of my proposal or any of its specific provisions.

While I certainly appreciate the opinions and perspectives of Majority Leader LeMahieu and Speaker Vos, the speaker and majority leader represent only two of the 132 legislative districts that comprise the Wisconsin State Legislature. Each of Wisconsin's 132 legislators—including the remaining 130 beyond two Republican legislative leaders—must be accountable to the people who elect them.

Wisconsinites in each of Wisconsin's 132 legislative districts deserve to know whether their legislators support ensuring child care is affordable and accessible for working families, investments to prevent the collapse of our state's child care industry, and efforts to expand paid family leave, among other critical initiatives in my special session legislation to address our state's workforce challenges. Further, understanding each legislator's position and perspective is not only a fundamental part of legislative accountability but is also a crucial first step toward being able to find real, meaningful solutions to our state's urgent challenges. Yet, to date, few members of the Legislature have taken any public position on the merits of my special session legislation to comprehensively address our state's workforce challenges and prevent a looming child care crisis, either in whole or in part.

Unfortunately, this situation is neither new nor unique.

For years, I have called the Wisconsin State Legislature into special session to address pressing state challenges. These efforts have ranged from providing middle-class tax relief and support to working families facing rising costs due to inflation, investing in our kids and our schools, expanding BadgerCare, supporting our farmers and agricultural industries, and addressing gun violence, among other timely issues, only to have Republican leaders gavel out without any individual members having to publicly express their personal position on the legislation before them or facing accountability for inaction. Doing so has enabled individual legislators in the Wisconsin State Legislature to avoid questions, accountability, and scrutiny regarding their position on issues of statewide consequence.

Legislators should be expected to provide their positions on the merits of specific policy components of my workforce plan, my workforce plan in its entirety, and what initiatives or plans, if any, they support to meaningfully and comprehensively address our state's workforce challenges.

Moreover, this accountability is uniquely timely and important. As public press reports indicate there is a possibility the full Wisconsin State Legislature could necessarily face re-election next year, all 132 members of the Legislature should be expected to take a public position and stance on policies and solutions to address our state's most pressing challenges, and that includes efforts to prevent our child care industry's collapse, expanding paid family leave, investing in higher education, and targeted investments in high-need areas of our workforce.

To that end, as I presume you have had ample time to give my special session legislation thoughtful review and consideration, I am launching a legislative survey to ascertain your positions on this legislation and its provisions and respectfully request your responses to the following questions:

- Do you agree that the Wisconsin State Legislature has a role and responsibility in helping find real solutions to the pressing issues facing our state? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that one of the greatest issues facing Wisconsin is our state’s ability to find, recruit, and retain workers to join our workforce? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that ensuring families have access to affordable child care is critical to maintaining a robust workforce statewide? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that child care should be affordable and accessible for families who need it? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that mass child care provider closures will have detrimental effects on Wisconsin’s workforce and economy statewide? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that losing hundreds or even thousands of Wisconsin’s child care providers and slots statewide will force workers to leave our state’s workforce? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that losing hundreds or even thousands of workers will severely exacerbate Wisconsin’s existing workforce challenges? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that Child Care Counts played a critical role in ensuring child care providers remained open both during and beyond the pandemic? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that substantial, ongoing investments in Child Care Counts could prevent mass child care provider closures? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that programs like Partner Up! have been successful in facilitating collaboration between employers and child care providers to expand access to affordable child care? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that expanding Wisconsin’s paid family leave policy could help retain and recruit workers statewide? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that expanding our state’s paid family leave policy, which some neighboring states have already done, could help Wisconsin compete for workers against neighboring Midwestern states? Yes or no.
- Do you support expanding paid family leave in Wisconsin? Yes or no.
- Do you support creating a 12-week paid family leave policy in Wisconsin that allows smaller employers with fewer than 50 employees the ability to opt in? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that higher education, including the University of Wisconsin System and Wisconsin Technical College System institutions, are critical to educating, training, retaining, and recruiting Wisconsin’s workforce? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that higher education, including the University of Wisconsin System and Wisconsin Technical College System institutions, supports local communities, economies, and workers? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that massive layoffs or closures in higher education have detrimental effects on Wisconsin’s ability to educate, train, retain, and recruit for our state’s workforce? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that massive layoffs or closures in higher education have detrimental effects on Wisconsin’s local communities, economies, and workers? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that Wisconsin’s healthcare workforce has long faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining talented workers? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that bolstering Wisconsin’s healthcare workforce is critical to ensuring access to quality, affordable healthcare statewide? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that Wisconsin faces challenges recruiting and retaining educators, staff, and bus drivers, among other key positions in the state’s education workforce? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that retaining and recruiting more educators statewide could help improve outcomes for kids in classrooms across Wisconsin? Yes or no.
- Do you agree that retaining and recruiting educators statewide could help keep school class sizes small in school districts across Wisconsin? Yes or no.
- Taken in its entirety, if a vote on LRB-4085/LRB-4086 to comprehensively address our state’s workforce challenges were held today, would you vote yes? Yes or no.
 - If yes, please feel free to elaborate as to why.
 - If no, please indicate why, specifically, you do not support LRB-4085/LRB-4086 in its entirety.

- If you do not support LRB-4085/LRB-4086 in its entirety, are there specific portions, provisions, programs, investments, or other components in LRB-4085/LRB-4086 that you do support?
 - o If yes, please indicate which portions, provisions, programs, investments, or other components you support and why.
 - o Please also indicate which portions, provisions, programs, investments, or other components you do not support and why.
- If there are no portions, provisions, programs, investments, or other components in LRB-4085/LRB-4086 that you support, please indicate your reason for disagreeing with and opposing each.
- If you indicated that you do not support LRB-4085/LRB-4086 in whole or in part, are there changes, modifications, or amendments to LRB-4085/LRB-4086 that would garner your support?
 - o If yes, please indicate specifically which modifications, changes, or amendments to LRB-4085/LRB-4086 could be made to garner your support.
 - o If not, please indicate why you are unwilling to consider changes, modifications, or amendments to LRB-4085/LRB-4086 that would garner your support.

Please kindly provide your responses to these questions electronically to my legislative affairs assistant, Amanda Tomten, no later than 5:00 p.m. on Thurs., Sept. 14, 2023.

Yours in service,



Tony Evers
Governor