



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

January 13, 2026

Dear Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature:

Greetings and happy New Year. I hope you are well and that the holiday season provided ample opportunity for you and yours to rest, reflect on the last year, and recharge in preparation for getting back to work doing the right thing for the people of our state.

In 2025 the Year of the Kid, I was proud to sign a bipartisan 2025-27 state budget that we worked hard on together to do what's best for kids at every stage and every age, from early childhood to our K-12 schools to our universities and technical colleges. After months of deliberations and negotiations, I proudly signed our bipartisan, pro-kid budget that made critical investments to stabilize our state's child care industry, support student mental health, invest in our University of Wisconsin (UW) System, cut taxes for working and middle-class families and retirees, ensure access to healthcare in rural communities, lower out-of-pocket energy costs for families, and continue support for critical food security programs that kids, families, and seniors depend on. Our budget was a win for the people of Wisconsin, a win for our communities, and a win for the notion that Republicans and Democrats can still work together to get good things done even as Washington reaches new lows of dysfunction.

As we kick off another year of work together, there is, as always, much work to do—and much opportunity. We begin 2026 after a year of historic—and bipartisan—wins for the people of our state and with readily available resources to help us continue moving Wisconsin forward. Wisconsin closed the last fiscal year with nearly \$4 billion in our state's checking account and \$2 billion in our 'rainy day' fund. I also understand from the Department of Revenue that new projections will soon be released showing state revenue will be much higher than previous estimates expected. I am eager to get to work toward building upon last year's important work and successes. I hope you are, too.

While I am proud of the work we did together in 2025, let's be clear—the final budget I signed looked drastically different than the budget I proposed, which was designed to respond to real and pressing challenges facing our state. Despite a bipartisan agreement and commitment to increase the special education reimbursement rate to 42 percent, available funding will not cover that percentage. Additionally, for example, Republican lawmakers rejected my proposed investments to further lower out-of-pocket costs for seniors and working families, prevent property taxes from going up, crack down on health insurers and Big Pharma, ensure homeless veterans have access to housing, support our farmers and producers in the midst of economic chaos and uncertainty, ensure kids with higher needs have the support they need in our classrooms, clean up water contaminants like PFAS, and make sweeping reforms to our justice system and corrections, among hundreds of others.

Further, with more chaos being created every day in Washington, new challenges continue to emerge and evolve that deserve our immediate focus and attention. This includes responding to President Donald Trump's and Republicans in Congress' ongoing efforts to shift hundreds of millions of dollars in federal program costs to Wisconsin taxpayers and our state's future budgets.

Today, as we begin the New Year and the Wisconsin State Legislature returns to work, I write today to lay out our legislative priorities for 2026. We have proven time and time again that, despite these divisive times, we still believe in working together to get good things done for the people we serve. I am hopeful that we can continue doing so throughout the next 11 months during the remainder of the current legislative session.

I look forward to working with any legislators who are interested in passing bipartisan, commonsense legislation on any of the important priorities below to continue to move our state forward, together.

Let's get to work.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tony" and last name "Evers" clearly distinguishable.

Tony Evers
Governor

PROVIDE PROPERTY TAX RELIEF AND PREVENT PROPERTY TAX INCREASES FOR WISCONSIN HOMEOWNERS

A decade of the Legislature consistently failing to meaningfully invest in our kids and K-12 schools has consequences, folks—and that includes causing Wisconsinites' property taxes to go up.

While I have fought hard as governor to start reversing this trend by making historic investments in our kids and our schools, it is no secret that the Legislature still rejected billions of dollars that I have requested over the course of my four budgets as governor.

And, unfortunately, the results are clear: schools that have been squeezed and asked to do more with less for years can no longer afford to keep doors open and lights on, and Wisconsinites are going to referenda in record numbers. The good news is that Wisconsinites have shown this Legislature time and again that they support increasing investments in our public schools. But the bad news is that Wisconsinites had to raise their own property taxes—some of them repeatedly—just to prove it.

That is why I proposed a budget that would have provided over \$1.3 billion in property tax relief to prevent property tax increases for average Wisconsin homeowners and help lower property taxes for working families, veterans, and seniors across our state. My executive budget included a new incentive program for local governments to freeze property taxes, increased state aid to schools to reduce local levies, and bolstered the School Levy Tax Credit, which would directly provide tax relief on homeowners' property tax bills. I also proposed expanding and increasing the Homestead Credit and the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Credits to help provide targeted relief to seniors and veterans and their families, among others.

Of course, as members of the Legislature know, Republican lawmakers removed each of these proposals from my budget and, instead, approved no new funding to help keep property taxes down. Further, when I asked Republican leaders to make property tax relief part of our bipartisan budget deal negotiations, they refused. I urge the Legislature to right this wrong from the recent state budget and pass my plan providing over \$1 billion in property tax relief to working families, seniors, veterans, and many others across our state.

DELIVER ON OUR PROMISE TO DO WHAT'S BEST FOR OUR KIDS

Holistically supporting our schools must include dedicated support for kids with special needs. In the 2025-27 Biennial Budget, we worked together to secure the largest single increase in special education reimbursement rates in our state's history—larger than the increase in the previous three state budgets combined.

While I am proud of the bipartisan work we accomplished to achieve this increase, unfortunately, initial estimates from the Department of Public Instruction show that the available funding will not meet the percentage thresholds that Republican leaders and I agreed upon during our bipartisan budget negotiations. Given that the state has additional funds available, I am calling on the Legislature to make the necessary investment to ensure that our agreed-upon percentages for special education funding of 42 percent in 2025-26 and 45 percent in 2026-27 are met—or, better yet, to make the appropriation sum sufficient as I have repeatedly proposed. Doing so will ensure that our schools and our kids have the resources they need to succeed.

LOWER OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS FOR WORKING FAMILIES AND SENIORS

Since taking office, we have worked together to enact over \$12.6 billion in tax cuts, which will total \$2.4 billion in annual tax relief by the end of this biennium. Wisconsinites today are keeping more of their hard-earned income today than at any point in the last 50 years. I am proud of the work we did together in our bipartisan, pro-kid budget to eliminate the sales tax on utility bills, cut taxes for retirees and the middle class, and make child care more affordable for working families. Thanks to the tax cuts I have signed while in office, most middle-class Wisconsin taxpayers will see income tax cuts of 20 percent or more.

Even still, paychecks these days do not go nearly as far as they used to, especially with President Trump's reckless trade wars and on-again-off-again tariff taxes that are causing prices to go up on everything from produce to school supplies and everything in between. There is more we can and should do to give Wisconsinites a little breathing room in their household budgets by helping lower everyday out-of-pocket costs so working families, seniors, veterans, and farmers, among others, can make ends meet.

The Legislature should reconsider adopting my proposal to exempt basic family needs like diapers, incontinence products, over-the-counter medication, toothpaste, and breast pumps from the sales tax to help lower out-of-pocket costs for working families. Additionally, to help reduce the cost of groceries for those who need it, the Legislature should adopt my proposal that was stripped from the 2025-27 state budget to fund the Health Food Incentive Program, which reduces the cost of many healthy foods for recipients of FoodShare, especially as the Trump Administration doubles down on trying to make it harder for kids, families, and seniors to access basic food necessities.

Cut Healthcare Costs and Crack Down on Health Insurance Companies and Price Gouging

Healthcare should not be a privilege afforded only to the healthy and the wealthy. Wisconsinites should never have to choose between getting life-saving medication and care or putting food on the table and keeping a roof over their head. Unfortunately, it is a reality for far too many of Wisconsin's working families, seniors, and many others.

Congressional Republicans failed to extend tax credits under the Affordable Care Act before they expired, causing healthcare coverage costs in 2026 to go up by thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars for Wisconsinites across our state.

Folks, Wisconsinites should be able to get the healthcare they need when and where they need it—and without breaking the bank. Yet, far too many Wisconsinites feel like they are not getting a fair shake—not from their elected officials and not from their healthcare coverage. The Legislature must do more to hold health insurers accountable, protect consumers, prevent price gouging, and help Wisconsinites afford everyday, out-of-pocket costs, and I urge you to pass my plan to do it.

My budget proposal included a comprehensive plan to lower costs to help working families, seniors, and students, including eliminating the sales tax on several household items, cracking down on insurance companies and prescription drug price gouging, and lowering out-of-pocket healthcare costs. I encourage the Legislature to reconsider these proposals to lower costs, including exempting over-the-counter medications from sales tax, which would save Wisconsinites approximately \$70 million over the next biennium. The Legislature should also approve my proposal to cap the monthly insulin copay at \$35, crack down on health insurance companies for their surprise billing practices, and implement a prescription drug importation program to increase access to low-cost generic prescription drugs and further reduce out-of-pocket costs for Wisconsin families.

Importantly, I am once again calling on the Legislature to approve my first-of-its-kind proposal to audit insurers when their claims denial rates are too high. If insurers are going to deny claims, they ought to have a darn good reason for it. And to make sure Wisconsinites are getting the coverage they pay for, I'm calling for health insurance companies to be more transparent with Wisconsinites up front and before Wisconsinites purchase their health plan, and a new consumer protection office for the first time in state history, designed to help Wisconsinites whose insurance claims are denied understand their rights and pursue coverage for the healthcare they need.

I'm also proposing we work together to crack down on surprise billing, set new standards to expand the healthcare services and procedures that insurance companies are required to cover, set maximum wait times for scheduling appointments, and require covered services to be available within a minimum time and distance from the insured. This means Wisconsinites will be able to get care closer to home and in a reasonable timeframe, and that more healthcare services and procedures will be covered by Wisconsinites' health insurance automatically—no delays, no hassle, no questions asked. We have to do more to make sure folks can get the healthcare they need. Period.

Provide Postpartum Coverage for Moms to Improve Infant and Maternal Health in Wisconsin

Despite multiple overwhelmingly bipartisan proposals, Wisconsin remains one of only two states in the nation that does not offer postpartum coverage under Medicaid for 12 months—instead, only covering this critical care for 60 days. This is wholly insufficient, and I strongly encourage the legislature, particularly leadership in the State Assembly, to expand this coverage as I proposed in my most recent state budget proposal. One legislator should not be able to single-handedly obstruct a bill that's supported by a supermajority of the Legislature.

SUPPORT OUR FARMERS AND VETERANS IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS IN WASHINGTON

Ensure Wisconsin's Homeless Veterans Have Safe and Stable Housing

We make a promise to our veterans. When they return home to their civilian life, we promise we will support and serve them as they have supported and served us. Veterans have given so much in service to our state and nation—these heroes should not have to worry about being able to afford to keep a roof over their heads. Yet, today, in many ways, our country is failing to keep this basic promise, most especially under the Trump Administration, which has reportedly fired more veterans than any administration in American history. Our veterans need our help, perhaps now more than ever.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Legislative Fiscal Bureau clearly informed Republicans during budget deliberations that, “without additional funding, [Wisconsin's Department of Veterans Affairs] would not have sufficient resources to maintain the program's three sites,” the Republican-led Legislature then went on to refuse—inexplicably and *repeatedly*—to adopt my proposal that would have provided the necessary funding for two Veterans Housing and Recovery Program facilities to keep their doors open in Green Bay and Chippewa Falls, and it was not included in the final budget sent to my desk. As a result, these facilities were forced to close on Sept. 30, 2025.

Since then, Republicans have refused to pass standalone legislation to remedy this, leaving some of our nation's heroes without VHRP housing, even as they headed into the winter months. Republican lawmakers must pass clean legislation that makes the investments our veterans deserve, and that should have been approved in our state budget.

Invest in Our Farmers and Processors as Trump Trade Wars and Tariffs Wreak Havoc

Our farmers, farm families, and producers have been the backbone of our state for generations. Supporting them and Wisconsin's \$116 billion agricultural economy has been a top priority for me and my administration since Day One.

Because of the Trump Administration's reckless trade wars and chaotic tariff taxes, Wisconsin's farmers and producers are in the lurch. As one example, purchasing soybeans—Wisconsin's second largest crop export—has decreased drastically in response to President Trump's international tariffs, leaving our farmers with excess product and empty pockets. In addition, President Trump's plan to increase the beef import quota from Argentina risks the viability of our own cattle farmers.

Chaos and recklessness in Washington are hitting Wisconsin farmers and producers hard. To put it simply: the Wisconsin State Legislature—which represents America's Dairyland—must do more to support our farmers, producers, and Wisconsin's agricultural industries. Period.

Supporting our farmers, producers, and rural communities has never been more important, which is why I proposed eliminating the \$1 million cap on annual program expenditures and providing \$1 million each year in additional one-time funding for the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports. This initiative, established in 2021, aims to boost the export of dairy, meat, crop, and other agricultural products. Removing this cap would have further supported growth across our agricultural sector, but Republican lawmakers rejected this request.

Additionally, Wisconsin is proud to be home to hundreds of dedicated meat processors who support our local communities, serve area farmers, connect with consumers, and contribute to our economy—generating roughly \$34 billion to our state’s economy. Recognizing the significant unmet need for meat processing for Wisconsin farmers, in 2022, I created our Meat Talent Development Program to help attract, recruit, and train workers for the meat processing industry and provide support to students in Wisconsin meat processing training programs. With more than 500 state and federally inspected meat plants, the meat processing industry has a substantial workforce and role in Wisconsin's statewide economy, and we must continue to cultivate it, especially as Wisconsin farmers and producers continue to face chaos and uncertainty due to President Trump's reckless trade wars and tariff taxes.

I proposed continuing funding for the vital Meat Talent Development Program that I created in 2022 to help attract, recruit, and train workers for the meat processing industry, including those at the UW-River Falls’ Humane Handling Institute, and to provide support to students in Wisconsin meat processing training programs. Republican lawmakers rejected these requests, and my proposal was removed from the final budget that was sent to my desk. The Legislature should reconsider this decision and approve this request as soon as possible.

I urge legislators not to turn their back on Wisconsin farmers and their families and provide critically needed funding for the Meat Talent Development Program and the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports that I proposed in my Executive Budget to ensure these critical programs can continue to serve Wisconsin farmers.

ENSURE ACCESS TO SAFE AND CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND PROTECT WISCONSIN’S NATURAL RESOURCES

Help Wisconsinites and Our Communities Get PFAS Out of Our Water

Every Wisconsinite should have access to safe, clean drinking water free of PFAS, lead, and other contaminants. After years of proposing investments to respond to emerging pollutants like PFAS contamination, I was proud that the Legislature joined me in making the first meaningful, statewide investment to respond to and address PFAS contamination across our state and approved \$125 million to fight PFAS contamination as part of our 2023-25 Biennial Budget. Yet, two and a half years after I approved of these investments, they continue to sit in Madison unspent.

My administration has been and continues to be willing to work with anyone in the Legislature to ensure these critical investments are released. I have been grateful for the opportunity for my administration to work directly with Republican lawmakers toward a bipartisan compromise that will ensure these investments are released. I understand from the Department of Natural Resources that these conversations have been productive, and I am optimistic that we may soon have a proposal that members of the Legislature on both sides of the aisle can support. The \$125 million we approved more than two years ago must get out to families and communities across our state. Let’s keep working together to get this done and make this another bipartisan win for the people of Wisconsin this session.

Renew the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and Protect Our Natural Spaces and Resources

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has a long and proud history of bipartisanship, reflective of the leaders for which it was named. However, despite our many conversations, I was deeply disappointed that we could not reach bipartisan agreement on my comprehensive Stewardship Program reauthorization proposal before the budget needed to be signed. With the Stewardship Program set to expire at the end of this fiscal year, I am hopeful that legislators are having meaningful, bipartisan conversations with all interested parties to move forward on a reauthorization proposal. I would be glad to sign any reauthorization proposal that appropriately supports *both* land acquisition *and* property management of Wisconsin’s valuable natural resources and public lands to secure the future of this program that is so fundamental to Wisconsin's proud and cherished tradition of conservation.

CUT RED TAPE, SAVE TAXPAYERS, IMPROVE SERVICES

Cut Red Tape to Help Speed Up Affordable Housing Projects Across Wisconsin

Accessible, affordable housing continues to be an issue I hear about almost everywhere I go, and it's becoming increasingly difficult for Wisconsinites to find. Safe, reliable, and building more affordable housing is also critically important if we want to continue our work building the 21st-century workforce Wisconsin needs to support a 21st-century economy. If we want to be competitive in recruiting, training, and retaining workers, we must have housing options that can support workers, their families, and their needs.

I am proud of the bipartisan work we have done during my time in office to build more affordable housing across our state, including approving the largest state investment in affordable housing in state history. However, we must continue doing more to rapidly expand housing across Wisconsin, and Assembly Bill 194 will help cut red tape and reduce barriers to accessing the investments we already approved and incentivize more multifamily and single-family housing development. I am hopeful that the Legislature will pass this legislation, among several others, that build upon the progress we enacted in 2023.

Support Wisconsin's Workforce by Restoring Resources for License and Credential Processing

Thanks to my administration's efforts over the past seven years to bring Wisconsin agencies into the 21st Century, today, state government is working smarter and faster than ever before. Our administration has spent years working to bring Wisconsin agencies into the 21st Century and make sure state government works better for the people we serve.

For example, I directed additional resources to ensure that the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) could strategically allocate staff, technical, and financial resources to expedite license processing without sacrificing due diligence in scrutinizing applications. This resulted in landmark achievements for DSPS, including the 114,000 new licenses issued in 2023 and 2024—35 percent more than in any previous two-year period. This resulted in more than \$54 million in added wages for Wisconsin workers in 2023. In June 2025 alone, DSPS processed 6,775 new licenses, marking a near-record month for the department.

Under my administration, Wisconsin was able to license more people to join our workforce more quickly than at any point in state history. Then, Republican lawmakers rejected my proposal to permanently provide the necessary resources to sustain these peak levels of performance and have since obstructed DSPS from getting the funding and staff they need. I understand the Legislature last week allowed a similar request to move forward, and I am hopeful it does. However, the unnecessary delay in providing these resources has already made an impact, and calls that once took five minutes now take half an hour. As this session continues, my administration will work expeditiously to reverse the impacts caused by the Legislature's delays in providing needed resources, and I ask the Legislature to refrain from creating any additional barriers or obstructions to this important work.

Eliminate Restrictions to Enable Retired and Experienced Workers to Rejoin Our State Workforce

Attracting the best and brightest folks to public service helps ensure our state and local communities are providing the most efficient and effective services for all Wisconsinites. Given our state's low unemployment rate and competitive labor market, we should be making it easier for those who want to continue in public service to return to public service.

I have proposed allowing Wisconsin Retirement System annuitants to return to public service without suspending their annuity, regardless of their occupation. Doing so would allow, for example, experienced educators who have retired lend a hand in our classrooms, retired former law enforcement officers to help staff our correctional institutions, and retired firefighters train the next class of first responders at our technical colleges. I have been pleased to see several related bipartisan bills have advanced out of committee this session, and I urge the Legislature to send these proposals to my desk.

Reduce FoodShare Payment Errors to Save Wisconsin Taxpayers Hundreds of Millions in Potential Future Costs

Roughly 700,000 Wisconsinites, including nearly 270,000 kids, rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) aid, also known as FoodShare in Wisconsin. Republicans last year passed President Donald Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), which cuts essential SNAP food assistance by about 20 percent by increasing red tape, nutrition education programs, and forcing states to pay more for SNAP programs like Wisconsin's FoodShare. Due to these changes, as many as 43,700 Wisconsinites are at immediate risk of losing access to basic food necessities, and independent grocers and convenience stores, which already operate on thin margins, are often the main source of food for Wisconsinites in rural areas, are increasingly concerned about their bottom line and keeping their doors open.

Additionally, under the changes, states will be forced to pay for a higher share of SNAP benefit costs if payment error rates exceed certain thresholds. In Wisconsin, based on recent FY 2025 data, this could cost taxpayers an additional over \$200 million *every year*—that's \$400 million over the course of our two-year state budget cycle. And this doesn't even include the more than \$280 million it will already cost Wisconsin taxpayers to implement *other* changes included in Republicans' so-called 'Big Beautiful Bill.'

This is untenable for Wisconsin taxpayers and will blow a hole in future state budgets. But the good news is that the Legislature can act now and help prevent Wisconsinites from having to pay over \$200 million in penalties to the federal government. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) identified a need for an additional \$69.2 million in state fiscal years 2025-27 to implement the identified quality control measures and to cover the federal cut to administrative costs.

The sooner the Legislature invests in FoodShare quality control efforts, the more time DHS has to keep down our FoodShare error rate and save Wisconsin taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary and punitive costs. Wisconsinites should not have to pay hundreds of millions more for a reckless Republican bill that is already going to cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and add trillions of dollars to our federal deficit. Period.

Address Outstanding 2025-27 Budget Needs and Changes for Implementation

Technical fixes are still needed to correct errors contained in the final 2025-27 Biennial Budget as passed, such as appropriating funding as intended to support a new protective hearing equipment grant program at WisDOT. Additionally, important investments included in the final budget were placed in the Joint Finance Committee's supplemental appropriation, requiring additional legislative action to be released and implemented. This includes funding for innovative projects to bolster our state's dairy industry, dedicated resources to support professional development for science teachers, funding to assist local communities in applying for grants and compliance work, and grant funds to further support the UW System and member universities. Earmarking funding for these purposes without a plan or mechanism to implement programs helps no one. The Legislature should act quickly to pass the legislation needed to release these funds to my administration and other partners to begin implementing these programs.

REFORM OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM AND KEEP OUR KIDS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES SAFER

Revamp Wisconsin's Correctional System and Institutions

For years, Wisconsin's corrections system has put a strain on resources across the state, from local law enforcement to courts to annual corrections costs to taxpayers, coupled with a consistent lack of meaningful investment in evidence-based, data-driven programs proven to reduce recidivism, which help improve public safety and keep kids, families, and communities safe. Last year, I proposed a comprehensive corrections reform plan that would realign our adult correctional system to resolve longstanding barriers to safety and security in our medium and maximum-security correctional institutions. In a show of bipartisan agreement, \$15 million was designated in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to support planning and specifications for these efforts, including the closure of Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI). The closure of GBCI would mark just one step in a sequence of facility upgrades and conversions that, if effectuated, would see improvements to security and conditions across Wisconsin's adult institutions.

In October, the State Building Commission released the \$15 million approved in the budget to enable the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) to continue its work towards implementing the correctional realignment plan. I encourage the Legislature to continue to work with my administration to build consensus on enumerating all the necessary building projects, making the statutory changes and policy reforms to fully realize a facility realignment for DOC.

Together, we can ensure the timely closure of GBCI, revamp Waupun Correctional Institution into a state-of-the-art vocational-focused facility, and close Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools, all while modernizing our correctional system, saving taxpayer dollars, and improving public safety and the safety of our institutions.

Here is the simple reality: if there is no additional action taken yet this session, then once that \$15 million in planning dollars is exhausted, work on designing and building DOC facility projects will stop. The costs of these projects will only go up, and taxpayers will only pay more. And it will only further delay facility building projects and, ultimately, the closure of GBCI. We must get this across the finish line this session.

Ensure Individuals Reentering Our Communities Have the Skills to Join Our Workforce

With historically low unemployment and regularly high workforce participation, Wisconsin cannot afford to have any workers on the sidelines. When people in our correctional institutions complete their sentences and reenter our communities, we need them to have the skills they need to join our workforce, which not only supports our economy but also helps ensure they are safe and successful after prison.

The DOC has deployed on-site job labs at six DOC facilities, most recently at Oshkosh Correctional Institution, to offer job readiness services to people in our care to prepare them for release to the community in collaboration with local workforce development partners and technical colleges. However, my request of approximately \$2.5 million for continued funding for the mobile labs was not included in the state budget. Without that investment, DOC may not have the necessary resources to continue offering mobile job labs through the remainder of the biennium. I encourage the Legislature to invest in this program and ensure this beneficial service can continue.

Invest in Combatting Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence and Support Survivors

Domestic and intimate partner violence is a scourge on our state. There continues to be work we can do to help stop violence wherever and whenever it happens. Last year, I created the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention to support schools, law enforcement, domestic violence prevention organizations, firearm retailers, local governments, and others in helping crack down on crime, prevent violence, and keep kids, families, and communities safe. But this work cannot end there. The Legislature must do more.

We must close the loophole created between federal law and Wisconsin state statutes aimed at preventing domestic abusers from being able to possess firearms. This is a critical step as Wisconsin continues to see high rates of domestic and intimate partner violence, many of which, unfortunately, involve firearms. By reorganizing the crime of disorderly conduct and the definition of domestic abuse, we can make it easier for law enforcement and prosecutors to determine whether a conviction qualifies as a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, and we can help save lives by ensuring violent and dangerous individuals do not possess a firearm or a license to carry a concealed weapon.

Additionally, we must do more to help survivors of violence recover and heal. Federal funding for the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) program has been cut by approximately a third in recent years. While I continue to believe the federal government has a responsibility to fund federal programs, in the absence of increased federal resources and support, the state must invest in VOCA to provide critical victim services, including reimbursing out-of-pocket costs for victims and survivors, like medical costs and counseling, and supporting rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, and child abuse response programs. I asked the Legislature last year to approve \$66 million to help fill the VOCA federal funding gap, but it was removed by Republican lawmakers during the biennial budget process. I'm urging the Legislature to make it a priority to get this done this year so we can ensure victims and survivors receive the support they need and deserve.

Keep Our Kids, Families, and Communities Safer by Reducing Crimes Involving Guns

In addition to domestic violence, we must do more to prevent violence and crime in all its forms, including crimes involving firearms. Gun violence, including suicide by firearm, continues to persist in communities across our state, especially in our rural areas and communities. I have spent seven years asking the Legislature to take gun violence seriously and to do its part to help fight crimes involving guns. I am once again asking you to join me in this important work.

I have proposed commonsense efforts to reduce gun-related crime and save lives. I asked the Legislature to adopt a “red flag” law, which is similar to laws we already have, to give law enforcement critical tools to keep guns out of the hands of someone who is a dangerous risk to themselves or others. I have proposed requiring violent history checks for most firearm purchases, so everyone goes through a background check, no matter what kind of firearm they are buying or where they are buying it. I have proposed closing the loophole that allows domestic abusers to possess firearms, enabling people who are in crisis to temporarily prevent themselves from purchasing a firearm, promoting safe firearm storage in homes with kids and people who are prohibited from possessing a firearm, banning untraceable “ghost guns” and other gun modification devices, and efforts to promote safe firearm storage to keep guns out of the hands of kids and dangerous individuals. Republican lawmakers have refused to give most, if not all, of these proposals even so much as a public hearing.

These are real, meaningful, and commonsense solutions that could save lives. We do not have to choose between respecting the Second Amendment and keeping kids, schools, streets, and communities safe—we can do both. The Legislature can and must do better than doing nothing. Let’s finally get something done that will help prevent gun-related deaths in Wisconsin.