



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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ELECT CANDIDATES FOR KIDS

MAKE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES A TOP PRIORITY DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN SEASON

During election season, candidates do a lot of talking. They talk about their priorities and the kinds of legislation they intend to champion. They tend to tailor their message to the audience they are addressing at the moment. And who is this audience they are talking to?

Sometimes, the audience is YOU. Your job is to make sure that candidates are talking about the issues that matter most to you—issues that impact the lives of kids and families in Wisconsin—and to make your voting decisions on the basis of where the candidates stand on these issues. Unfortunately, candidates usually talk VERY LITTLE about children's issues. After all, kids don't vote or make campaign contributions. That's why it's imperative that those of us who care deeply about these issues do our best to make them an important part of electoral campaign debate and discussion.



We believe, and think our elected officials should believe:

- **Every** young child should have access to high quality early learning.
- **Every** child deserves a world class education; and our nation can afford to give it to them. In fact, we can't afford not to.
- **Every** child should have enough to eat and a stable home to live in.
- **Every** child should have access to health care.
- **Every** child should be safe from violence at home, at school, and in their communities.

Our nation can afford to provide these things for our children. In fact, we can't afford not to.

Every Wisconsin voter should be able to go to the polls knowing where the candidates stand on critical kids' issues, and what they intend to do to improve the lives of every child in the state.

EASY WAYS YOU CAN RAISE YOUR VOICE FOR KIDS BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTION

Before the Election

1. Find out who the candidates are on the ballot in your area and what offices they are running for. Contact your local County Clerk's office and go to the [Government Accountability website](#).
2. Visit candidates' websites to see if they have taken positions on the issues you care about.
3. Invite candidates to visit your program or community. Set up a meeting with local candidates to talk about the issues you're most concerned about. Prepare for the meeting by outlining your top issues, why the candidates should be concerned, how the issue affects people in the district, and what you hope the candidate will do when he/she is elected. Please email [Sabrina Gentile](#) if you would like more assistance in planning your event.
4. VOTE! Be an informed voter and vote regularly. One of the first things many elected officials do when they are contacted by a constituent is to check to see if that constituent is a voter. If you are not a voter, your advocacy messages may not have as much impact.

After the Election

1. Contact your elected officials and urge them to support children's issues – You can contact the Governor and legislators by email, phone call or attend office hours. Pick the issue that is important to you. Speak from the heart and share your story with them. Find out who represents you on the [State Legislature website](#), or call 1-800-362-9472.
2. [Sign up for WCCF's action alerts and/or email lists](#) to stay updated as bills or state budget items progress through the legislature. WCCF will let you know when statewide public hearings on the state budget are being held so you can attend and speak publicly about the advocacy priorities you feel most strongly about.
3. Add your elected officials to your newsletter mailing list. Let them learn about what your organization does, the people you serve, the successes you've had and the challenges you and your clients and community face. Find their email addresses in the [Assembly Directory](#) and [Senate Directory](#).
4. Get to know your legislators' staff. Let them know you can serve as a local resource on the issue you care about. View staff as your allies and the "gatekeeper" to getting information to the legislators. Get their contact information from [Assembly](#) and [Senate Staff Email Directories](#). Sign up for your legislators' e-newsletters.
5. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper – Be concise, tell a personal story. Try to stay under 250 words. Legislative staff read daily and weekly papers regularly.
6. Join with others – Join a campaign, recruit friends and co-workers, connect with a statewide group that works on your issue. It only takes TEN (10!) constituents calling or emailing on the same issue for a state legislator to pay attention.
7. Connect with elected officials via Social Media – Most elected officials have Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or both. "Like" them on Facebook and "follow" them on Twitter.

ASK THE CANDIDATES WHERE THEY STAND ON CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Here are a few suggested questions you might want to ask candidates if you attend a candidate forum or meeting, or have other opportunities to communicate with those running for office.

Candidates for State Government Office:

Early Care and Education

- Recently \$100 million has been cut from the state child care budget. Research shows that if children are ready for school they are more likely to succeed, saving taxpayer money later. Do you support increased investment to improve the quality of early care and education for young children?

Health Care

- Governor Walker said the health insurance changes in his 2013-15 budget, coupled with the Affordable Care Act, would almost cut in half the number of uninsured Wisconsinites – even though the state was significantly reducing eligibility of adults for BadgerCare. If the state falls far short of that reduction in the uninsured, would you support using federal Medicaid funds to increase BadgerCare eligibility for parents and childless adults to 133% of the poverty level?

Juvenile Justice

- We know that providing appropriate services to youthful offenders can reduce reoffending, make our communities safer, and support stronger economic growth. Specifically, do you support returning jurisdiction over non-violent 17 year old offenders to the juvenile justice system?

Homestead Tax Credit

- In contrast to nearly all of the rest of the state tax code, Wisconsin's Homestead Tax Credit isn't automatically adjusted for inflation. As a result, this tax credit – which provides targeted property tax relief for low-income households and seniors – has been declining in value and fewer people are eligible. Should the Homestead Credit be adjusted annually for inflation?

Tax Cuts

- Lawmakers have been cutting taxes, even as the state reduces investments in children and families for lack of resources. What is the right balance of tax cutting and investing in Wisconsin's future?
- The state tax cuts enacted this session will primarily benefit the highest earners, even though the wealthiest already pay a smaller share of their income in state and local taxes than people who are not as well off. Is giving tax cuts to the top earners the best way to create jobs in Wisconsin?

Candidates for Federal Government Office:

Early Care and Education

- Research demonstrates that investing in early learning pays off in higher graduation rates, reduced crime, and taxpayer savings. Do you support federal legislation that would expand access to quality early education?

Health Care

- The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which has enjoyed bipartisan Congressional support in past years, comes up for renewal in 2015. Do you support reauthorizing this source of federal support for health care coverage for children?
- Do you support continuation of the federal health care reform law? If so, are there changes or improvements you would support? If you don't support continuing it, is there a replacement plan that you support?

Immigration

- The DREAM Act (Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013, S. 744) is a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill that would provide a direct road to U.S. citizenship for undocumented youth who graduate from U.S. high schools and attend college or perform military service. Do you support the DREAM Act or a pathway for undocumented youth to become U.S. citizens?

Minimum Wage

- Do you support raising the federal minimum wage from \$7.25/hour to \$10.10/hour, a move that would give a raise to 1 out of 5 Wisconsin workers? The minimum wage was last increased in 2009.

Safety Net Programs

- Some lawmakers advocate for reducing investments in safety net program for vulnerable families as the best way to address the federal deficit. How do we find the best balance of new revenue and spending cuts that will keep the economy strong and our children safe and healthy?

Now you've seen some examples of questions we should all be asking the candidates. Here's what we child advocates would love to hear in their answers:

An Agenda for Children and Families in Wisconsin: A Sampling of Issues We Care About, and Think Candidates Should Care About Too

Early Care and Education

Every Wisconsin child deserves a great start; the first five years are extremely important in setting the foundation for lifetime learning and productive citizenship. Investments in early learning and development are cost effective, and yield an impressive return. They are the right thing to do for kids and a smart thing to do for economic development. We need a coherent and comprehensive early care and education system. Wisconsin should:

- Continue to implement an effective YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care, which provides resources and incentives to help programs improve the quality of early learning.
- Increase access to affordable, high-quality early care and education services by strengthening the Wisconsin Shares subsidy program; sustaining and improving 4-year-old kindergarten, Head Start and Early Head Start; and improving services to children with disabilities.
- Design and implement policies that support Wisconsin child care providers in the fight against obesity by creating active learning environments.

Health Care

Wisconsin is rightly proud to have the nation's seventh-lowest rate of uninsured residents, but our work is not done until everyone has access to quality health care. To achieve this goal, our state should:

- Maintain support for BadgerCare and continue outreach efforts to eligible but unenrolled families, while striving to minimize red tape and inefficiency in the enrollment and renewal procedures.
- Take advantage of the Medicaid option in the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which would improve access to affordable insurance coverage for low-income adults, while also saving money for state taxpayers and county human service programs.
- Work to improve public understanding of the new health insurance marketplace, and look for ways to improve implementation of that marketplace and coordination with BadgerCare.
- Use opportunities provided by the Affordable Care Act to improve access to preventive health services, particularly dental care and mental health services.

Budget and Revenue

We support a balanced approach to solving Wisconsin's fiscal challenges in order to ensure that the state has sufficient resources to maintain investments that help make Wisconsin a great place to live and do business. Wisconsin should:

- Ensure that Wisconsin's public systems have the revenue they need to develop a competitive workforce and promote a high quality of life for Wisconsin's children and families. Tax cuts should be limited, and when they do occur, should primarily benefit taxpayers with the lowest incomes.
- Protect and improve the progressive elements of the income tax code, including tax credits that help working families with children lift themselves out of poverty. Eliminate tax breaks that skew the distribution of taxes by making low- and middle-income households pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes.
- Emphasize accountability in the tax code by periodically reviewing corporate tax breaks and eliminating those that aren't tied to job creation.
- Devote additional resources to collecting a greater share of the unpaid taxes owed to the state.
- Provide sufficient school aid to improve and equalize opportunity for students in all districts. Reform the aid formula to account for differences in poverty rates between districts and ensure all students get an education that enables them to learn in school and succeed in life.

Economic Security and Poverty Reduction

Nearly 750,000 Wisconsinites are poor, childhood poverty is increasing faster than the national rate, and nearly half of African-American children live in poverty. Supporting families as they lift themselves out of poverty requires a two-generation approach, including access to family-supporting jobs, sustainable housing, adequate health care, and high quality early care and education. In addition to the priorities outlined above, strategies for addressing these interconnected needs include:

- Increase the minimum wage and protect living wages.
- Support the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Homestead Tax Credit.
- Strengthen the technical college and University systems and improve financial aid to help bridge the jobs gap.
- Expand the successful Transitional Jobs program.
- Engage community, faith, business, and government leaders to invest in the social and economic well-being of communities.

Racial Equity

Wisconsin has some of the highest levels of racial and ethnic disparities of any state in the nation, including disparities in outcomes related to education, health, poverty, unemployment, adult incarceration, juvenile justice, and child welfare. Addressing racial disparity is essential not only for social justice, but also for economic growth, so that all sectors of Wisconsin's population are able to contribute to the state's economic vitality. We call for:

- A commitment to gather and analyze data related to disparities and to identify potential opportunities for change.
- A public commitment by state and local government, business, and nonprofit leaders to reduce disparities on key measures of child and family well-being.
- Targeted investments in economic security, health care, education, justice, and child welfare to reduce disparities.
- Improved communications and relationship building so we can have the important and difficult discussions we need about race and our state's racial disparities.

Juvenile Justice

Both kids and communities depend on the juvenile justice system to respond fairly and effectively to youthful offenders. WCCF seeks to promote system and legislative reforms that ensure youth and families receive developmentally appropriate services and supports in order to get them back on track to becoming a responsible adult. To achieve this goal Wisconsin should:

- Return jurisdiction of 17-year-olds arrested for the first time for non-violent offenses to juvenile court.
- Ensure that no youth under age 18 is confined with adults prior to conviction.
- Provide resources to gather uniform data, including race and ethnicity, on a statewide basis about the juvenile justice process and youthful offenders in order to ensure fairness and evaluate effectiveness.
- Focus increased investments on system improvement strategies that build the capacity of counties and others working with youthful offenders and their families to deliver cost-effective, community-based services.

Child Safety

Every child deserves to live in a safe home and community, free from danger to their health and well-being. To better protect children, we should:

- Safely decrease the number of children in foster care through increased focus on maltreatment prevention, placement stability, and permanency.
- Improve services and outcomes for children who age out of the system without a permanent living arrangement.

For more information about making children and families a top priority during election campaign season, visit our website at www.wccf.org, or call us at 608-284-0580.