

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 Douglas  
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  
Metcalfe Park Community Bridges, Inc.  
Midwest Environmental Advocates  
Milwaukee Branch NAACP  
Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission  
Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)  
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