



October 2020



Race to the Polls

Lift Families of Color out of Poverty

Wisconsin's children, families, and communities will be better when every person in the state has the opportunity to thrive. The events of this year, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting economic recession have had a devastating impact on Wisconsin's families and especially on communities of color. Consequently, it is imperative that we work with unrelenting dedication to address our severe racial disparities. Too many children and families are being left behind, and racial disparities in poverty remain alarmingly high. In order for Wisconsin's economy to work for all of us, Wisconsin's lawmakers, its business owners, and its community leaders must stand up for racial, ethnic, and economic equity. This election season, voters must demand that candidates talk about and promote policies that will improve the well-being of children, families, and communities of color and address institutional racism.

Over 200,000 Wisconsin children live in poverty, and we have severe racial and ethnic disparities in childhood poverty. For example, compared to white children, African American children were 4 ½ times as likely to live in poverty, American Indian children 4 times as likely, Latinx children over 3 times as likely, and Asian/ Pacific Islander children were more than twice as likely to live in poverty. Because of these dramatic disparities, it is essential that candidates prioritize economic equity. We must tackle childhood poverty while also addressing the needs of families. The causes and consequences of poverty are interconnected and reinforcing, so our solutions must be too. Specifically, we urge candidates to:

- **Increase employment and income for low-income families of color.** Businesses should pay their employees family supporting wages. Even before the recession that resulted from Covid-19, wages had stagnated at the bottom while profits were going almost exclusively to those at the top. This dynamic has only accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Added to this skewed picture is the fact that in recent years, lawmakers have cut taxes for those who are well-connected and rig the system for their own benefit, while the rest of us are left behind paying the bills.
- **Improve support for low-income working families of color so parents can better balance the twin challenges of parenting and success on the job.** Public and private institutions both play important roles in addressing these needs. For instance, businesses need to create family-friendly workplaces that offer health, vacation, and family leave benefits that support parents taking care of their kids. No one should have to decide between keeping their job or taking care of a sick child. Lawmakers must also pass laws and invest funding that enhances transportation services to better meet the needs of low-income commuters, increases the availability of parent education,

family counseling and family preservation services, and creates more affordable and safe housing for low-income families of color.

- **Invest in equitable education for low-income children and youth of color so they meet developmental milestones, enter kindergarten ready to learn, and succeed throughout their educational careers.** All parents should have the tools and supports they need to help their children learn and grow. We must expand access to affordable, high quality child care and early learning programs. Lawmakers must adequately fund our K-12 system so it meets the needs of all children, families and communities with a focus on schools serving poor communities. Furthermore, lawmakers should ensure that post-high school educational opportunities are available and affordable for students of color.

Our state will thrive and prosper when children are prepared to become thoughtful leaders, engaged community members, and valued employees. Poverty makes it harder for children to activate their skills and talents to the detriment of us all. Reducing child poverty, and racial disparities in child poverty, is essential for a just economy and equitable future, and it must be a priority for voters and candidates running for public office. Everyone must play their part in making Wisconsin the best place for every child, every family and every community.