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Kids Forward Opposes Sweeping Deletion of Fiscal Items from Budget

The following is a statement by Ken Taylor, executive director of Kids Forward, regarding the proposed motion to strip 60 fiscal policy measures from the budget bill during the Joint Finance Committee's first executive session on the 2019-21 budget.

The proposed motion treats scores of important budget proposals the same as non-fiscal policy items in the bill. As a result, major budget items – many of which enjoy broad popular support – will be swept aside without even giving legislators a chance to review the usual Legislative Fiscal Bureau papers.

If legislators believe these significant fiscal items should not be in the budget, they should make their case in the course of a deliberative debate on the proposals, rather than restructuring the committee process to impede an open and transparent debate.

Pushing aside the proposal to expand Medicaid and capture more than a billion dollars of additional federal funding for health care would create a \$324 million hole in state General Purpose Revenue for Medicaid. That choice would make it far more difficult to fund the much needed health care investments in Wisconsin, such as increases in mental health and substance use treatment, the Healthy Women/ Healthy Babies initiative, and increased access to dental care.

Deleting the Medicaid expansion squanders an opportunity to reduce the number of uninsured Wisconsinites and the amount of uncompensated care for hospitals. Without opportunity for thorough debate, the motion will mean that single childless adults who have minimum wage jobs will be ineligible for BadgerCare and will continue in many cases to be uninsured.

Lumping together 60 major budget proposals and setting them aside with little more than a procedural vote is disrespectful to the Governor and to the majority of voters who elected him. More importantly, it is a callous way of handling proposals in the bill that would help hundreds of thousands of low-income Wisconsinites who are struggling to make ends meet.

Over the last eight years, while the legislature passed tax changes that cut taxes for a cumulative total of about \$8 billion, legislators also boosted taxes for people who receive the state Earned Income Tax Credit and the Homestead Credit. That decision and others have contributed to the growing economic divide in our state, which especially hurts rural Wisconsinites and people of color. Using a procedural motion to remove from committee consideration numerous fiscal policy choices that would benefit low-income families and other low-wage workers is a harmful precedent and reflects a set of priorities out of step with what Wisconsin families need.

