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Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) 2015 Policy Agenda

In Wisconsin, we value opportunity, responsibility, family, and community. We want all our children to be healthy, successful in school, and members of supportive families who live in safe neighborhoods. All of us will benefit by creating opportunity for more and more of Wisconsin's children and families to thrive; thriving children and families are the basis of a brighter future for all of us. Communities, businesses, schools, non-profit organizations, faith communities, civic associations and governments all have a role in working together to support the success of children and families.

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) has spent over 130 years working to make our state a place where every child has the opportunity to succeed. As Wisconsin's only statewide, multi-issue child advocacy group, we speak out for children through research, public education, coalition building, and advocacy. Our goal is to promote policies and practices that enable every child in Wisconsin to grow up safe, healthy and successful, in a nurturing family and just community, and to hold all of us accountable for our roles in achieving that goal. Wisconsin has a great distance to travel to ensure that all of our children are thriving, and when we see increasing childhood poverty and significant racial disparities, it can sometimes feel like we are going backwards.

WCCFs primary public policy goals for 2015 will help our state move forward.

- **Family Economic Success and Racial Equity:** We will advocate for public and private investments, policies and programs that will improve family economic success and racial equity. We'll support policies that ensure that lower-income residents of Wisconsin do not pay a larger share of their income in taxes than the wealthy; offer opportunity for more people to rise out of poverty through work, including the education and training that enables opportunity and productivity; maintain basic supports for all children; and directly address racial and ethnic disparities.
- **Developmentally Appropriate Juvenile Justice:** We need to have a justice system that responds to youthful offenders in a developmentally appropriate manner so they can become positive contributing members of society. Specifically, we need to give non-violent 17-year-old offenders a second chance to become productive citizens by addressing their first offense in the juvenile justice system. This effort will give our state a second chance to capitalize on young people's potential, reduce long term costs, and decrease the number of future victims.
- **High Quality Child Care:** We want more children in high-quality child care so they are ready for school, with a primary focus on vulnerable children. Wisconsin should step forward and invest \$18 million per year to partially restore the payment rates that were frozen in 2008. This does not require new funding because child care subsidy payments are \$100 million lower than they were five years ago. The evidence is clear that this investment will pay long term dividends to all of us.

- **Healthy Families:** We need to ensure that all children and families have affordable health insurance that provides access to quality health care. To achieve this, we need to maximize insurance coverage by improving enrollment and renewal processes, and by using the tools provided by health care reform to expand coverage for parents and childless adults.
- **Adequate Funding to Create Opportunities:** The state budget is a reflection of our priorities; it is the place where we make decisions to invest in our collective future and the well-being of children and families. Adequate funding is needed for education and services that help children and families succeed and make Wisconsin economically competitive in the long run.

Our children and families who face challenges don't experience them in isolation, but far too often our policy solutions are isolated and siloed. Instead, our solutions must be as interconnected as our challenges are. All of WCCF's policy goals are interrelated and mutually reinforcing components of a family and community improvement cycle.



Our society thrives when individuals, businesses, and government work together to achieve common goals; we must all invest in our children and families if we want them to thrive. There is ample and compelling research that shows a strong return-on-investment for efforts that reduce the share of children and families who are poor, create more opportunities for high quality child care and educational opportunities for children and youth, increase public safety by working with juvenile offenders so they are less likely to re-offend and more likely to become contributors to society, and improve health.

Our work together to identify challenges and provide solutions to achieve common goals is as important today as at any time throughout WCCF's 134-year history. Our State has great opportunities to advance our common interest and economy in the long term through investing in children and families today.