



# ELECT CANDIDATES FOR KIDS:

## Make Children and Families a Top Priority During Election Campaign Season



**D**uring 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, and to make your voting decisions on the basis of where the candidates stand on these issues. Unfortunately, most political candidates talk very little, if at all, about children's issues. After all, kids don't vote or make campaign contributions. That's why it's so important that those of us who care deeply about issues that affect children and families do our best to make those issues a bigger part of electoral campaign debate and discussion.

### **An Agenda for Children and Families in Wisconsin:**

#### **A Sampling of the Issues We Care About, and Think Candidates Should Care About Too**

We all want Wisconsin to be a place where all families have the opportunity to thrive. For children, that means growing up in a just, safe, and nurturing family and community. It is our collective responsibility to make sure all Wisconsin families have the chance to move forward. These policy priorities point the way toward that vision of our state.

#### **Early Care and Education**

We need a coherent and comprehensive early care and education system that gives every child a great start. The system should in-

clude quality standards, professional development, technical assistance, monitoring and accountability with a strong data system, ongoing financial assistance, and engagement with parents and communities. A successful system would feature:

- Successful implementation of the YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care, with an effective incentive system for programs to improve the quality of early learning and development within the Wisconsin Shares subsidy program.
- Increased access to affordable, high-quality early care and education services by expanding 4K, increasing the number of children served by Head Start and Early Head Start, assuring fair payment policies in the Wisconsin Shares subsidy program, and ensuring access to effective services to children with disabilities.
- Expanded evidence-based home visiting programs.
- At the federal level, we need reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which has not been reauthorized since 1996; and increased funding for Head Start.

### Health Care

Wisconsin is rightly proud to have one of the lower rates of uninsured children and parents in the nation, but our work is not done until all children and adults have access to quality health care. To achieve this goal we need to:

- Maintain support for BadgerCare Plus, including coverage of adults without dependent children; improved outreach to eligible families; continued efforts to simplify enrollment and renewal procedures; and better access to care for those enrolled in the program.
- Fully implementation of the Affordable Care Act health reforms in Wisconsin, including expansion of Medicaid and implementation of health insurance exchanges where families can access private insurance coverage at a cost they can afford.
- Explore and fund innovative strategies to increase access to dental care and mental health services.
- Implement long-term, prevention-focused strategies to eliminate Wisconsin's glaring racial disparities in health outcomes.
- Protect and utilize other provisions of federal health care reform, including consumer protections for people with private insurance, improved access to preventive care, and strategies for improving quality while slowing the growth of health care spending.

### Juvenile Justice

All children deserve fair treatment in court. WCCF seeks to ensure that youth are treated through the juvenile court, where

their developmental needs can be met most effectively. We should:

- Return 17-year-olds to the original jurisdiction of the juvenile court.
- Create a statutory preference for diverting nonviolent juvenile offenders into proven community-based services.
- Require data tracking by race and ethnicity of youth referred to the justice system to begin to reduce disparate impacts on youth of color.
- Invest in youth development and prevention strategies that have proven to be effective in preventing delinquency and other risk behaviors.

### Child Safety

Every child deserves to live in a safe home and community, free from danger to their health, safety and well-being. The following can help bring us closer to that goal:

- Improve the quality, consistency and outcomes of child welfare prevention, early intervention and intervention services.
- Safely decrease the number of children in foster care through increased focus on maltreatment prevention, placement stability and permanency.

### Budget and Taxes

We support a balanced approach to solving Wisconsin's fiscal challenges in order to ensure that the state has sufficient resources to maintain its infrastructure and sustain excellent education (from early care and education through post-secondary) and human services systems. We need to:

- Provide the Department of Revenue with the resources to collect a greater share of taxes owed to the state.
- Ensure that businesses pay a fair share of income taxes, and eliminate corporate tax breaks that aren't closely tied to job creation.
- Protect the progressive elements of the state income tax code, and restore the process of annually adjusting the Homestead Tax Credit for inflation.
- Avoid cluttering the state constitution with amendments that could tie the hands of policymakers and make it harder to balance the budget in the future.
- At both the state and federal level, treat investment income the same as salary and wages, rather than providing tax breaks for income received primarily by the wealthy.





### Racial Equity

Wisconsin has some of the worst racial and ethnic disparities of any state in the country, including outcomes related to child welfare, health, high school graduation, unemployment, adult incarceration, and juvenile justice. It's crucial that we address

these issues--and the social, economic, educational and environmental inequities that contribute to them—as a country, as a state, and in our own communities. We call for:

- A public commitment by elected leaders to set goals to reduce disparities across all systems.
- A requirement to gather and analyze data related to these disparities to identify potential opportunities for change.
- Targeted investments in health care, child welfare, education and employment to reduce disparities.
- Efforts by public officials to reach out to and engage private leaders and resources, especially in communities with the greatest disparities, to identify systemic changes that can be made to improve opportunities for children and families of color.
- Valuing the contributions that immigrants make to our state and nation, and removing barriers to success for their children.

### 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:

- What are your thoughts on the quality of early care and education in Wisconsin, and what changes, if any, would you support to improve the quality of care for young children, particularly with regard to Wisconsin Shares and the YoungStar quality rating and improvement system?
- Wisconsin has a strong record of providing residents with access to health insurance coverage, but that does not always translate into actual access to health care services, especially in rural areas and low-income urban neighborhoods. What strategies would you suggest to address this problem?
- Enrollment in our health care safety net programs has grown dramatically in recent years, and yet many Wisconsinites remain without coverage. The Affordable Care Act provides opportunities for improving the situation, but some policy makers have been reluctant to take advantage of them. How would you balance the need to cover as many people as possible with the challenge of meeting the cost of doing so?

- How would you address the significant disparities in health outcomes and educational outcomes between children of color and their non-minority peers in Wisconsin?
- Do you support returning 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system? Do you support diverting more youthful offenders, especially nonviolent offenders, into proven community-based services?
- The state budget will remain extremely challenging in the foreseeable future. Do you believe the budget gap should be filled through spending cuts alone, or are there revenue-side approaches to the problem that you would support?

#### Candidates for Federal Government Office:

- Do you support reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant and increasing funding for Head Start?
- What is your position on health care reform? Do you support protecting and expanding on the Affordable Care Act, or do you favor another approach?
- What changes to our current federal tax structure do you support? Do you want to end the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy? For the middle class? For everybody?
- What, if any, changes would you make to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides block grants to states for programs that help low-income kids and families?





## Easy Ways You Can Raise Your Voice for Kids Before and After the Election

### Before the Election

1. Find out who the candidates on the ballot in your area are and what offices they are running for. Contact your local County Clerk's office, or go to the Government Accountability website at <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/results>.
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.
4. Go to the Wisconsin Council and Children and Families' Electoral Advocacy page at [www.wccf.org/election\\_resources.php](http://www.wccf.org/election_resources.php) for more electoral advocacy tips and links to other election-related websites.
5. 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 these children's issues. You can contact the Governor and legislators by email, phone call, or by attending 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 in the state legislature



at [www.legis.state.wi.us](http://www.legis.state.wi.us), or call 800-362-9472. Find out who represents you in Congress at [www.house.gov/representatives/find/](http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/).

2. Sign up for the Wisconsin Council and Children and Families' action alerts or e-newsletters ([www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org) → Take Action → Alert Sign-up) to stay up-to-date on your priority issues. 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 issues 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, your clients, and your community face.
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.
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 a campaign, recruit friends and coworkers, 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.



555 West Washington Ave  
Suite 200  
Madison, WI 53703  
608.284.0580  
[www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org)