

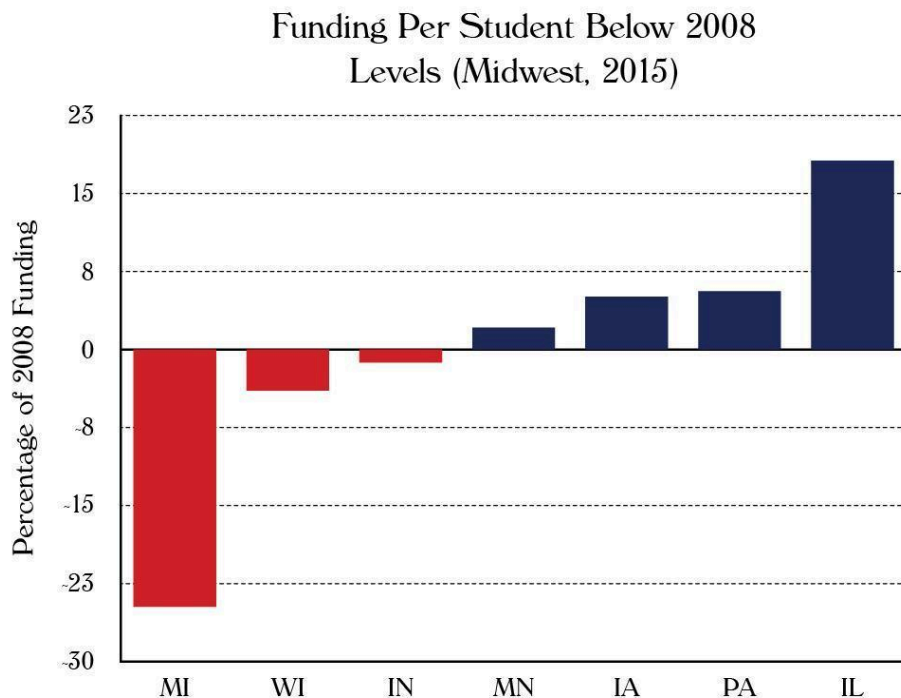
Education

State funding is the most common and most effective lever used to address disparities in local communities' ability to fund public education. As Wisconsin's robust state funding program has shrunk, we've seen increased disparity in per pupil funding among the state's school districts — and, with it, factors that contribute to Wisconsin's worst educational indicators.

Educational Opportunity Gaps

For seven of the past 13 years, the National Assessment of Educational Progress ranked Wisconsin as the state with the country's highest black–white opportunity gap¹, an educational indicator directly linked to the funding disparity among the state's school districts.

Wisconsin was among the slowest states to recover public school funding levels after the 2008 economic crisis.² After the Recession, our legislature cut spending in several areas as the primary means to balance the state budget, rather than use a mix of spending cuts and tax increases.



(Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "A Punishing Decade for Schools," Figure 8, Nov. 29, 2017)

Our current funding system benefits wealthy suburban districts, where local referenda to raise revenue for schools through increased property taxes is easier to support than in high-poverty

urban and rural districts. Of the 421 School Districts in the state, there were 93 school districts that went to referendums on the April 2nd, 2024 ballot.

Wisconsin, like all states, relies on state funding to address the imbalance in local communities' ability to raise revenue for schools — namely, to ensure high-poverty districts receive support from the state to close per pupil funding gaps. We do this through a complicated formula that has become a venue for partisan posturing when it comes time to create the annual budget.

Known as “equalization aid,” the current policy formulates funding primarily based on property taxes, rather than income — a better indicator of the ability of families to pay taxes toward schools. One result of this is that high-poverty districts across the state receive disparate levels of support. Most troubling is a consistent racial disparity: Wisconsin’s nonwhite high-poverty school districts have 18 percent less funding per pupil than the state’s white high-poverty school districts.⁴ This disparity is likely due to calculations that are based on property tax, rather than income.⁵

As things stand, high-poverty and affluent school districts in Wisconsin receive about the same level of state funding per pupil. Wisconsin gets a B rating from the Education Law Center on our distribution of state funding between affluent and poor school districts, a C on our overall funding level compared with other states and a C on our funding efforts compared with state wealth.⁶

In addition to the disturbing black–white opportunity gap in the state, Wisconsin faces a rural–nonrural divide in access to educational tools and opportunities. As schools increasingly integrate technology into the curriculum, 23% of Wisconsin’s rural families still lack access to high-speed internet.⁷

Attracting and Retaining Outstanding Teachers

Act 10’s dismantling of our teachers’ collective bargaining rights has widely been shown to lower pay and increase turnover rates. It means Wisconsin cannot retain the teachers we attract.

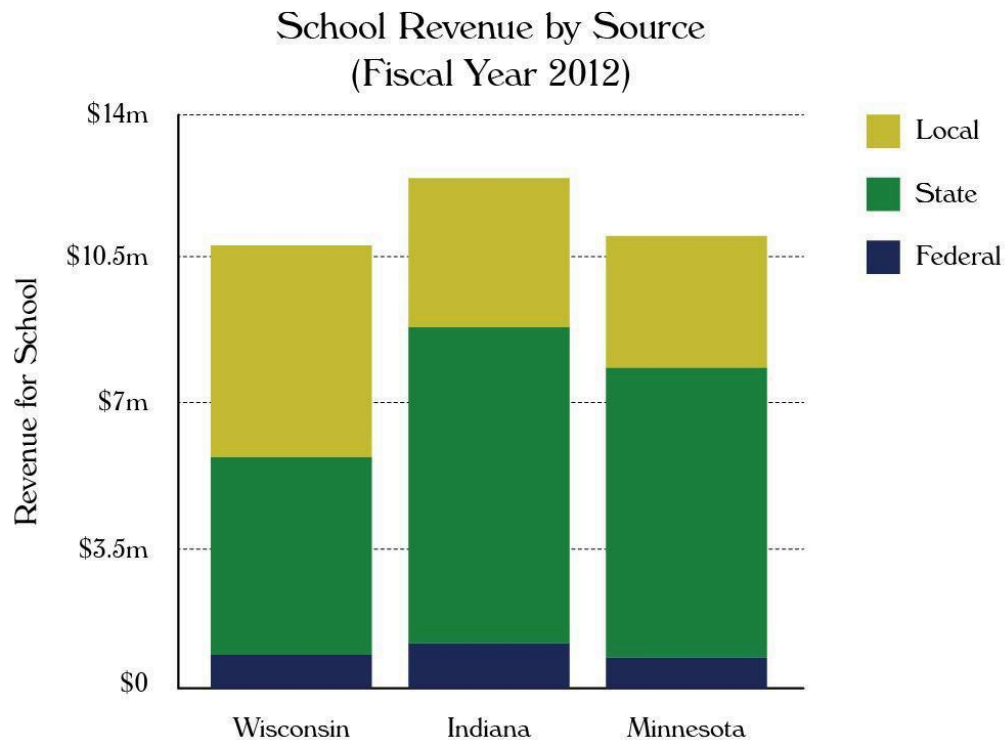
Declining aid from the state limits communities’ ability to offer competitive salaries to attract a diverse core of teachers and aides. Madison Metropolitan School District, for example, offers lower salaries for teachers than comparable districts⁸ -- a key factor in the higher turnover rates among Black, Indigenous and teachers of color nationally.⁹

Policy Solutions

As the legislature attempts to revise Wisconsin’s “equalization aid” formula, Gov. Evers has directed more money from the state’s general fund toward school districts to temporarily offset costs to local communities.

It's important to note Francesca supports not only adequately funding our Public Schools, but to ensure taxpayer dollars do not go towards private schools that do not have to adhere to the Wisconsin Constitution. While there are many good actors in the private and charter schools across the state, these schools get to pick their students and not the other way putting vulnerable students often from diverse backgrounds at risk of harm.

Wisconsin's formula — so dependent on property taxes — disadvantages neighborhoods where income levels would be better criteria for state funding. We need more robust changes to the formula, or we will perpetuate these disparities in funding and opportunity. We must also revise some property tax credits and formulas that are directly linked to education funding.



(Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts: School Year 2011–12," Table 1, January 2015)

I will support the following measures to right the imbalance in funding to Wisconsin's schools:

1. Increase state funding of schools across the board. Returning state funding of schools back to its two-thirds level before 2008 will reduce reliance on local property tax. To fund this increase, I will support these measures:

- **Repeal the \$350 million voucher that directs state money to private schools.** Taxpayer dollars belong in our neighborhood public schools.

- **Repeal key tax cuts to restore the \$3.5 billion lost** in the state’s general fund since 2011, including the Manufacturing and Agriculture Credit, which requires no job creation and pays out primarily to millionaires.¹¹
- **Repeal the current law that requires that school districts reduce property taxes** when they receive an increase in state aid for education. Rather than letting schools utilize excess funding, the district must reduce taxes, netting no gain for schools.
- **Repeal the School Levy Tax Credit**, a regressive credit that awards property tax credit based on home value, meaning the more expensive your home, the more money you get.
- **Repeal the private school tuition deduction**, which allows private school tuition payers to claim a tax deduction of \$4,000 per K–8 student and \$10,000 per high school student, regardless of how wealthy they are.¹²

2. Revise two key aspects of the formula for school funding to equalize or offset disparities in local revenue. First, revise how the state calculates the amount needed for a good education. Second, revise how the state calculates each local communities’ ability to pay.

- **Direct 5 percent more funding to districts in high need** compared with those in affluent districts. This can also be applied within districts.
- **Incorporate additional factors into the formula** to more accurately determine a district’s need. Gov. Evers’s plan proposes incorporating a rate-of-poverty factor, but we should also consider incorporating income levels; costs including teacher compensation, professional development, building maintenance, English-language learners; and cost of living for teachers.
- **Challenge “hold harmless” provision** in Gov. Evers’s plan that makes it impossible for the state to bring parity to school funding. These provisions keep existing district-level funding in place, meaning districts that continue to receive high levels of state funding cannot have those funds reduced, making it harder for those that receive lower levels of funding to catch up.
- **Stop counting the School Levy Tax Credit as “state support for schools.”** Removing this aspect of the formula will provide a clearer picture for the public of the amount of actual state dollars schools receive.

3. Propose a budget that ensures teachers no longer earn less than police officers. We need to ensure teaching can be a career and that teachers can afford to live in our communities.

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Housing

The Wisconsin legislature must commit to prioritizing the creation and preservation of democratically controlled deeply affordable housing, especially in the wake of the COVID19 pandemic.

Affordable and central housing is an important public goal for which most municipalities struggle to create effective public policy. In Midwest urban areas like Madison, where income inequality drives the market to higher-end housing, modest-cost single family housing is stagnant.^{tk}

Municipalities typically advocate for more diverse, market-rate units to serve residents across a wider range of incomes, basing plans on statistics on rising one-bedroom prices. These frames capture some, but not all, of what policy is up against. Although higher-end housing is being built, profit is also being made off of rising prices in poor urban neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, market-rate housing aimed at more moderate communities does not address rising land prices that make the “market rate” exceedingly high for moderate-income families. In addition to general price increases, residents face new lease requirements, preference for corporate purchasing, lifelong penalties to credit, and greater tenant responsibilities for housing units — meaning, for many residents, housing is experienced as a set of changing rules, not only changes in supply and demand.

For too long, state housing policies have favored landlords in the purchase, rent, maintenance, and sale of housing. Republicans in the state legislature have made it easier for landlords to speed up evictions, eliminate tenant legal defenses, and increase city policing power in housing. Runaway market inequity can no longer serve as a justification for legislators to back off policy that protects tenants on the market.

An Urgency to Rethink How Housing Markets Work

For many of our local residents who see housing prices rise where cost-burden is the status quo — as it is for nearly half of Madisonians — the housing market looks as much like unfair guidelines as it does a tough market.

ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Can they afford housing?

Y Yes N No



Food Service



EMT



Hotel Service



Plumber



Public Teacher



Retail



Nurse



Delivery Driver

City	Housing Type	Food Service	EMT	Hotel Service	Plumber	Public Teacher	Retail	Nurse	Delivery Driver
		Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
APPLETON	RENT	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
	OWN	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
FOND DU LAC	RENT	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
	OWN	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
GREEN BAY	RENT	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
	OWN	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
MADISON	RENT	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
	OWN	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
OSHKOSH	RENT	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
	OWN	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
MILWAUKEE	RENT	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
	OWN	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N

Source: <https://nhc.org/paycheck-to-paycheck/>

Landlords have few rules restricting the terms of lease contracts. They can set minimum income or job requirements for renters, face no requirement to contact tenants before putting a house up for sale, and can set rents at their discretion.

Our goal must be fair housing for all, which includes the ability to live and afford housing near work, schools, hospitals, and transportation.

- Cost-burdened renters have few alternatives:** More units are being built for higher income households, driving up the value of property around them and raising the prices of lower-income housing. Minimum wage earners in the Madison area would have to work 80 hours to afford to rent an average two-bedroom apartment in the city.^{tk} More concerning, this is true far outside of the city, which means residents can't simply move to find more affordable housing. The nearly 33,000 households who relocated from Madison in 2019 were likely pushed to suburban rentals with similarly rising costs.
- States preempt many local powers:** State laws give the advantage to landlords in most housing contracts and development goals. They hand a negotiating edge to landlords over tenants and keep communities from stabilizing rents, demanding frequent inspections when housing is in disrepair, or zoning for more diverse housing.

- **The housing market has fewer attentive landlords:** Wisconsin's housing markets have been remade in the wake of the great recession. Private equity and corporate landlords converted single family homes into rentals to take advantage of rising property values. Landlords with means to distribute risk among investors make for aggressive, less attentive property owners, with less incentive to fix, and more means to pass responsibilities onto tenants. Wisconsin state law prevents most cities from regulating landlords and pricing, and they've seized the opportunity.
- **More residents are cost-burdened by housing:** 71% of low-income families in Wisconsin are severely rent burdened,^{tk} meaning they more than 50% of their income toward housing.
- **Black Wisconsinites shoulder the largest burden:** Rising prices in majority-Black and brown areas are aggravating the disparities between young white and young Black home owners.^{tk}
- **Tenants face severe penalties when they can't pay rent:** Housing crises are longer-term problems for most tenants than we often acknowledge. The inability to pay rent on time can damage a tenant's credit history, lead to future wage garnishment, and harm their ability to rent in the future. Tenants without stable income are at a greater risk of losing housing and finding new housing during the current economic crisis, because landlords control terms of employment for potential tenants.

Housing: What We Need

Madison's housing policy is outdated for some elements of the market, and state policy gets in the way of regulations. The result is weak protections for renters, insufficient affordable housing, and no plan to address the new round of foreclosures caused by the current eviction crisis.

- **More permanently affordable units:** Building higher-density, affordable housing in high-demand areas to combat historically low vacancy rates in cities like Madison is a good start. Relying primarily on Section 42 tax credits since 2014, the city has added 1,000 affordable housing units in the last five years. While it does little to reduce the average cost of housing, Section 42 has afforded cities a temporary solution by offering tax credits to developers who build affordable units. However, many of these units will term out of their affordability in the coming decade, and in the meantime, owners of these properties have little incentive to maintain them. Section 42 housing will play an important role in continuing to build affordable housing but its terms for tenants must be improved, including delinking rents from median income and making it easier to adjust rent if a household loses income.
- **Workforce housing:** Affordable housing is critical, but pricing is only one aspect. In urban areas like Madison, affordable housing must also be located close to where residents work. This means affordable housing must be zoned close to central business districts. Only 5% of rental units in Dane County are affordable for households making

30% of the area median income, though those households make up 15% of the county's population.^{tk}

- **Area Median Income:** There are more people in Madison who qualify for Section 8 federal housing assistance than there is money for it, in part because of a high area median income (AMI). States use AMI to determine Section 8 eligibility, typically cutting off eligibility for anyone earning above 80% AMI. In Madison that's \$54,950 for an individual (and \$78,500 for a family of four).^{tk} Because the city's AMI skews high, many residents who earn just above 80% are ineligible for housing assistance yet can't find affordable housing.
- **Housing Stock:** According to the WRA, 227,000 housing units must be built this decade if Wisconsin wants to grow its working-age population. Additionally, 140,000 housing units must be built in Wisconsin by 2030 to keep pace with current demand.
- **Zoning:** Fight to end state preemption laws (such as Wisconsin Statute 66.1015) that prevent localities from creating inclusionary zoning laws in neighborhoods that exclusively permit single family units. Even small increases in multi-family units, single room occupancy units and accessory dwelling units could yield several hundred new homes per neighborhood, making our cities more affordable for our working-class neighbors, artists and hospitality workers. I refuse framing that pits Madisonians against each other.
- **Devoted Affordable Housing:** Funding permanent affordable housing through tax credits for developers means affordable housing with expiration dates and few incentives for proper maintenance. The primary mechanism for building affordable housing must shift from tax credits to a state-level permanent fund that allows the state to subsidize construction and maintenance while maintaining a renewable source that can withstand changes in the housing market. In the meantime, I will fight to ensure that any developer receiving Section 42 credits — whether for-profit or non-profit — will be subject to state oversight of maintenance, so sites are kept in good shape and tenant complaints are addressed on time.
- **Regulations to prevent transfer of units to private equity:** Poised to exploit a new wave of foreclosures, bills like CA [SB 1079](#) are intended to make it more difficult for big-money investors to buy up properties en masse either after foreclosure or at any point of sale. Although the bill specifically “prohibits the bulk sale of foreclosed properties” to for-profit firms by granting the right of first refusal to nonprofits, this could be extended to include tenant options for purchase (as is currently law in Washington, D.C.). Policies like these are not permitted in Wisconsin because of the requirements it puts on landlords to notify tenants/nonprofits before a sale.
- **Landlord and rent control limits:** Impose low ceilings on how much landlords can increase rent every year, while preventing evictions of existing tenants in response to steep rent hikes - an enforcement plan finding success in [Oregon](#) (where these laws are also banned). In Madison, for example, a simple cap on 5% increases in rent would stem

the rising rents. In addition, repeal Republican prohibition of municipalities from requiring regularly scheduled inspections (Statute 66.1015). Create policies prohibiting landlords from turning away prospective tenants because of older criminal convictions and eviction actions, income, or race.

- **Mandate the lowering of the area median income** or revise its calculation: the rate for Madison since it excludes many BIPOC and sets fair housing values still quite high. Lowering the AMI in line with per capita income (which helps determine who qualifies for federal assistance) will make relief available to more who need it, not to mention more accurately capture those who find housing unaffordable.
- **Enable Alternatives to For-Profit Developers:** Non-profit developers are often outbid by larger, for-profit corporations when competing for Low Income Housing Tax Credits like Section 42 or attempting to purchase existing housing lots. Non-profit community developers have better records when it comes to maintenance and responsiveness to tenants. They should be incentivized to acquire property through separate tax relief or exemption programs. In addition, when housing is for sale, implement right of first refusal bids for pre-selected nonprofit housing organizations, who can bid on multi-family buildings before they go on the open market.
- **Community Land Trusts:** Land trusts, in which residents lease land from trusts that have taken property off of the speculative market, regard affordable housing as a right and not an efficient solution for unfair markets. Like some non-profits, they struggle to compete with for-profit entities in the acquisition of land or property, so their role must be prioritized through funding that helps them remain financially self-sustaining and keeps land under residents' control for generations, not simply years. Public funds and statutory requirements can prioritize bids to convert land to community trusts and create separate, permanent funding streams. Alternatively, land submitted to community trusts can be made exempt from existing property tax levels.

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Pro-Family

We must view care work as infrastructure. Policies including Paid Family and Medical Leave for all workers, High Quality Childcare access and fair wages and benefits for caregivers.

Care can't wait, and legislation like [AB 1156](#) which Francesca was the lead author on and introduced on February 14, 2024 allows workers who elect to contribute a portion of their wages to the social benefit program can claim up to 14 paid weeks each year of both Family and Medical Leave.

Unpaid leave is not enough and current law mandates that workers get at least two weeks of unpaid leave if they're seriously ill or need to care for a seriously ill family member. This law only applies to businesses with at least 50 employees. AB 1156 is one of the most comprehensive family and medical leave bills in the country.

With over \$4 Billion dollars of surplus money in the Wisconsin General Fund, the \$259 million to jumpstart this transformative policy is beyond reasonable. No one should have to choose between caring for themselves or a loved one and a paycheck.

Health Care

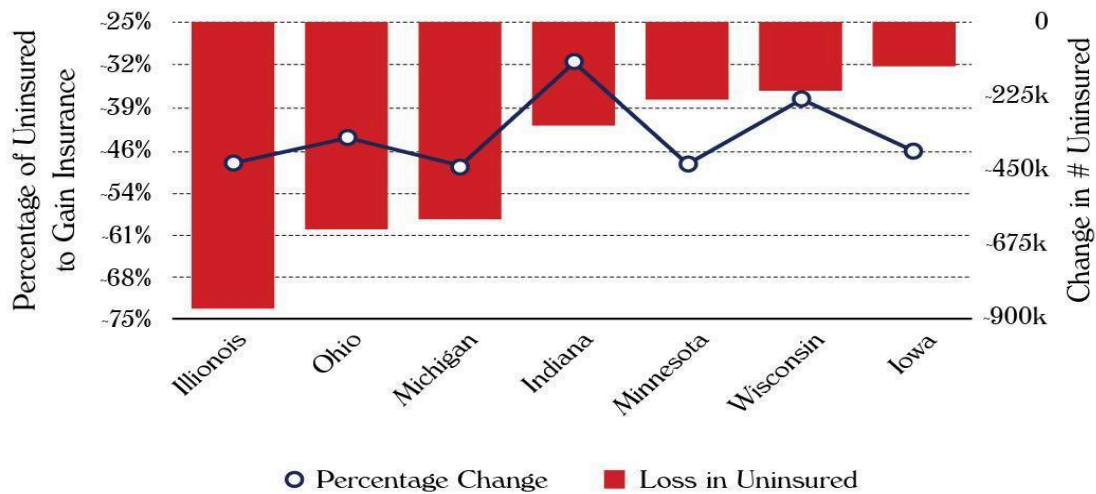
We typically measure the effectiveness of health care provisions by access to care. According to that criteria, Wisconsin fairs relatively well.

We have the lowest uninsured rate¹ (5.5%) among states that rejected Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. Because of BadgerCare Plus, low-income Wisconsinites have access to a wider range of benefits than is typical of residents even in states that expanded Medicaid. Early union victories in the workplace also contribute to a relatively high percentage of employer-covered plans (about 57%).²

Legislators here have actively rejected a fully-backed public option in favor of health policy heavily reliant on private insurance. Even BadgerCare, the state's much-lauded public option, incorporates waivers designed to limit eligibility. In the plan's own words, these policies are intended to "align BadgerCare Plus more closely with private insurance policies".³

(Source: Urban Institute, "Who Gained Health Insurance Under the ACA, and Where Do They Live?" December 2016)

Net Decline in Uninsured Residents after ACA Implementation (2010-2015)



But a public plan modeled on private insurance is not a public compact. Wisconsin residents are some of the most insured⁴ in the country, but we are likely to be charged more⁵ by health care providers, because private insurance companies are less effective at negotiating down health care costs than public agencies.

The health care costs insured middle income workers are left to cover is rising.⁶ And as anyone who has navigated individual insurance plans knows, just because you have insurance does not mean health care is affordable. Private insurance companies cannot promise, enforce, nor be held accountable for your care; what they possess instead is broad authority to turn down medications under coverage, reduce in-network providers, or ask recipients to conduct their own negotiation with providers.

Even when private policies are combined with policies available through the health insurance marketplace and BadgerCare, what look like cracks now will become part of widening and less predictable gaps in coverage. Wisconsin's insurance landscape will continue to be an eligibility corn maze. This is not access. Public health is only as strong as the compact between the state and its residents.

BadgerCare Plus is a start. But as long as BadgerCare operates without the coverage, funding, and reporting capacity of Medicaid expansion, its recipients are subject to waiver changes with no guaranteed assistance to help them find new plans.

Policy Solutions: From “Access” to Compact

A weakened role for the state in health policy leads to diminished capacity to fight for Wisconsin residents' health. This includes the ability to fight a number of federal policies such as the rollback of ACA programs under President Donald Trump.

Restoring public health as a compact between the state and its residents, not individuals and their employers, empowers everyone.

I will support the following measures to restore public health as a compact between Wisconsin's public officials and our residents.

- **Stand-alone Medicaid Expansion legislation (WI AB745).** Wisconsin is losing out on millions of taxpayer dollars that have already been allocated for the state. This would give us \$190 million in federal support and add nearly 80,000 Wisconsinites¹³ to the public option.
- **Public Option legislation (WI AB746)** AB 746 creates a less expensive, high quality BadgerCare Public Option health care plan that would be available for purchase on the Affordable Care Act marketplace by all Wisconsinites, regardless of income level, with sliding scale premium subsidies based on income. The plan would be administered through BadgerCare and include very low cost-sharing provisions, including lower premiums than private insurance plans and very small copays. The Public Option plan would also be available on the small group marketplace so that small businesses and nonprofits could for the first time afford to offer high quality employer-sponsored coverage for their employees at an affordable rate.
- **Expand health care infrastructure in rural Wisconsin.** Insurance only goes so far if the infrastructure for health care delivery is underfunded. Through mobile health care clinics and increased incentives for specialists to practice in rural Wisconsin, we increase the state's capacity. At the same time, all funding for institutions must be tied to affordable care, higher pay for hospital workers, and increased access to health care.
- **Price negotiation.** We must strengthen the state's bargaining power by negotiating for better health care and prescription drug prices for all residents no matter how they receive insurance. We should join states that have created bodies authorized to review, make public, and negotiate prices on prescription drugs like insulin on behalf of both commercial and state-sponsored insurance programs.
- **Ease enrollment** by making it easier for residents to determine which programs they qualify for and making it less likely they become removed from existing plans. I will push for automatic calculation of eligibility for a variety of programs if residents check a box on state tax filings (as Maryland does).

- **Ensure coverage beyond full-time employees.** I will support measures to include more part-time, gig, and contract workers in employer insurance plans and extend unemployment benefits to them, as we did early in the pandemic.

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Elections and Redistricting

On February 19th, 2024, Governor Tony Evers signed into Law Act 94 ensuring new fairer district maps for Wisconsin. This is a monumental achievement and a result of coalitions building and grassroots work across Wisconsin to demand that with the State Supreme Court actions and the work of Democrats in the legislature, we will finally have elected officials that will be held accountable and can be better representation for the people of Wisconsin.

Voting Restrictions in Wisconsin

It still remains harder to vote in Wisconsin than in nearly half the states in this country, according to an evaluation of objective measures including registration deadlines, automatic- or pre-registration options, ease of absentee ballot application, number of voting locations, forms of identification required, and poll hours.

In 2011, Act 23's voter ID requirement established a disdain for the commonplace act of voting that laid the groundwork for wholesale disenfranchisement of the electorate through the state's well-documented gerrymandering.

- **Voter ID:** Wisconsin's aggressive stance on voter ID laws makes it harder than in most states for residents to meet proof-of-residency requirements. Wisconsin is ranked as one

of only six states with “strict Photo ID laws” by the National Conference of State Legislatures.³ As a result of restrictions on the documents required to acquire valid forms of ID, many residents must navigate bureaucratic barriers. Meanwhile, college students without a Wisconsin ID must get second ID cards from their schools as well as Voter Enrollment Verification letters.

- **Felony disenfranchisement:** In Wisconsin, disenfranchisement does not stop at those who are currently incarcerated. It extends to those on probation, parole or extended supervision. In addition, the state’s record expungement laws are some of the strictest.
- **Early voting restrictions:** Wisconsin residents have only two weeks to vote ahead of election day, a significantly shorter time compared with other states and our own past regulations.

Policy Solutions

I support the following legislative measures to extend some of the changes made during the COVID-19 pandemic that reflect a willingness to protect voters.

- **Automatic voter registration:** Enstate automatic voter registration when residents come into contact with government agencies, such as the DMV, to prevent later confusion or barriers to registration.
- **Absentee ballots:** Our absentee ballot system must include timely delivery of ballots, removal of burdensome verification requirements including witnesses, and the secure delivery of ballots through the mail.
- **Criminal record expungement:** We can follow the example of states like Michigan, which signed into law the automatic expungement of criminal records, in part to hasten the restoration of voting rights for people convicted of felonies.

Sources

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