

WISDOM

Priorities for

Wisconsin

2021-2023



WISDOM

WISDOM is the statewide network of faith-based organizations, which began with MICAH's founding 1988. WISDOM has grown to include:

MICAH (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope)

RIC (Racine Interfaith Coalition)

CUSH (Congregations United to Serve Humanity – Kenosha County)

JOB (Justice Overcoming Borders – Beloit)

ESTHER (Empowerment Solidarity Truth Hope Equity Reform – Fox Valley)

SOPHIA (Stewards of Prophetic Hopeful Intentional Action – Waukesha County)

JONAH (Joining Our Neighbors, Advancing Hope – Eau Claire)

JOSHUA (Justice Organization Sharing Hope & United for Action – Green Bay)

NAOMI (North central Area congregations Organizing to Make Impact – Wausau)

RUTH (Responding with Understanding, Truth and Hope – Manitowoc)

MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equality and Solidarity)

Menikanaehkem (“Community Re-Builders” – Menominee Reservation)

WISDOM is part of the national Gamaliel Network, which has organizations in 17 states.

WISDOM's best-known work is the campaign called “ROC Wisconsin.” (See www.rocwisconsin.org.) ROC (Restoring Our Communities) Wisconsin calls for a drastic reduction in our incarceration rates and racial disparities. WISDOM also has a long-standing commitment to Public Transportation. Lack of mass transit affects all of us, but it especially impacts low income people, people with disabilities, and the elderly.

WISDOM and Gamaliel have stood with and for immigrants for many years by educating, advocating and acting together with our newest neighbors for policies that express our compassion and respect for all people.

Locally, WISDOM organizations are working on many issues, ranging from housing to public education to jobs.

A large and growing part of WISDOM is EXPO (EX-incarcerated People Organizing). EXPO members are formerly incarcerated men and women who have come together to offer mutual, positive support, and to lead in the struggle for change in the criminal justice system. Faith communities are called to stand with people who have suffered injustice and believe that the people most impacted by the issues need to lead our response.

Building the Beloved Community: Why We Do What We Do

Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

~ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Since WISDOM came together in 2000, its affiliate members across Wisconsin have valiantly fought to “bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice” on issues ranging from mass incarceration and mistreatment of immigrants to generational poverty and environmental degradation.

In doing this work, we can sometimes get caught up in the details of our current fights and forget that, if we are to create the “beloved community” envisioned by Dr. King and achieve lasting change, we must also transform ourselves and our organizations.

Whatever the specific issues of the day, our actions and advocacy reflect our three guiding values:

- Radical inclusion
- Costly reconciliation
- Living for the seventh generation

Radical Inclusion



At its core, “radical inclusion” means that, in the Beloved Community, *everybody’s in/nobody’s out*. While that seems a simple goal, our daily experience shows us how difficult it is to achieve. As human beings, we are wired to accept as “safe” those who look, act and talk like us, and to be wary of, if not hostile to, those who don’t.

To be truly inclusive, we must be willing to stand up for the radical belief that no one can decide who is worthy of inclusion and who is not.

But we make these decisions every day. When we advocate on behalf of people who have committed “non-violent” offenses, we risk drawing a line that implies that people who commit “violent” crimes are less worthy of our compassion and support. When we focus our attention on transit in specific neighborhoods, we may forget that there are individuals across town – immigrants, the elderly and those with disabilities – who also lack access to affordable transportation. And when we advocate for those who are incarcerated, that worthy focus should not blind us to the fact that thousands of immigrants, including children, are also being imprisoned.

In our organizations, we work to achieve and work to remember the richness that comes from diverse voices, viewpoints and opinions. And remember that there are many kinds of diversity -- not only people of other races, ethnicities and religious beliefs, but also

those who are different from us in age, physical and mental ability, gender, sexual orientation, geography or political beliefs.

If our task forces do not include those most impacted by the issues we address, our values compel us to reach out to those individuals. Our organizations must intentionally create pathways for impacted people to be included in decision-making and leadership. This might be uncomfortable, but discomfort often leads to growth.

Costly Reconciliation



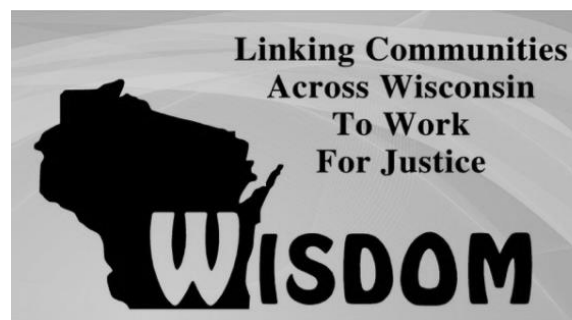
South African theologian and leader Desmond Tutu said, *“True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness, which is costly.”* It is not “forgive and forget” – as if nothing wrong ever happened. Instead, true reconciliation requires a full understanding of both the details and consequences of injustice. *“True reconciliation,”* Tutu reminds us, *“exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt and the truth.”* He continues, *“It is a risky undertaking, but in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.”*

Individuals who come from backgrounds of privilege often believe there are easy answers to problems such as racism, child poverty, immigration or mass incarceration. What’s missing in this superficial view is a deep understanding of the lasting effects of generations of exploitation and exclusion on cultures, families, health, education and relationships.

To achieve real healing, we try to do these three things:

- Practice deep listening and unequivocal forgiveness
- Work to repair the damage done by years of injustice
- Build lasting bridges across the racial, geographic, religious and other divides that separate us.

As another South African, author and anti-apartheid activist Alan Paton, put it: We must *“forgive and go forward’ – building on the mistakes of the past and the energy generated by reconciliation to create a new future.”*



Living for the Seventh Generation



According to Wilma Mankiller, the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, *"In Iroquois society, leaders are encouraged to remember seven generations in the past and consider seven generations in the future when making decisions that affect the people."*

Most of us are unlikely to ever meet individuals who are more than four generations behind us, yet we have an obligation to think about how the decisions we make today will affect not only them but their children's children – the seventh generation.

In a society that rewards short- versus long-term thinking, velocity over value and convenience over conscience, trying to do that is clearly swimming against the tide. But we must do it, both in our everyday lives and in our social justice advocacy.

We are already reaping the consequences of short-term thinking in the treatment of our air, water and land and the habitats of other living things. We also know that the impact of climate change is being felt first by the poorest among us and will exacerbate the challenges they face.

What may be less obvious is the extent to which we need to think about the future in our other work. For example, when we advocate for educational opportunity for all, we should consider not only the needs of today's children but also their children – and their children's children. Similarly, when we work for criminal justice reform, we remember that incarceration affects generations of families.

We need to also lay the groundwork today for those who, we hope, will continue to try to "bend the arc" after we are gone. Organizations, if they turn into institutions, ultimately die of their own weight. If we want future generations to use WISDOM and our affiliates as effective vehicles for organizing and advocacy, we must make decisions today that will ensure that the organization is flexible and ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.



WISDOM RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT

Adopted February 21, 2019

Our Aspirations

Racial equity is a core value of WISDOM and its affiliates and is practiced in everything we do.

- Diverse voices, viewpoints, opinions, thoughts, and ideas are actively encouraged and embraced throughout our organization.
- A culture of deep and authentic relationships throughout WISDOM and its affiliates fosters a sense of restored community and mutual caring.
- Our commitment to racial equity promotes a just, fair, respectful, inclusive, and thriving community for everyone in our organization and in the institutions, we seek to improve.

WISDOM and its affiliates, and participants individually, are open and responsive to constructively given feedback about racist attitudes or behaviors we may display, however unintentional.

- Mistakes are courageously and forthrightly identified. We will graciously “call each other in” and describe and discuss mistakes with clarity as part of a continuous education process.
- Patience, genuine caring, and compassionate listening are practiced in our mutual effort to understand oppression, both overt and systemic.

WISDOM and its affiliates are characterized by an intentional identity as an antiracist institution.

- Our antiracist identity permeates our organizational culture, values, norms, and behaviors.
- Diverse racial, cultural, and economic groups enjoy full participation and shared power in all aspects of our mission, structure, constituency, policies, and practices.
- People of color lead in the work we do and are always at the tables where decisions that affect us get made.

WISDOM embraces and champions policies that both provide for individual dignity and dismantle structural racism in the wider community by building clear lines of accountability to organizations of color and racially oppressed communities that are directly impacted by our work.

- Our work for racial liberation values embracing diversity/difference as a gift, the unique worth of every person, treating everyone with dignity, inclusivity, social justice, public good, and cultural competence (awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills). By living these values, we are better human beings.

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION STEPS AND MEASUREMENTS

WISDOM and its affiliates will take the following first steps toward fulfillment of these principles and will do an annual racial equity check-in to keep us all accountable. The WISDOM Racial Equity Core Team will provide tools for this to the affiliates (e.g., a WISDOM assessment tool to be used each October) and serve as resources to the affiliates as needed.

Provide Education on Implicit Bias: We will provide an Implicit Bias workshop in every affiliate and encourage all members to participate. This training is provided through Gamaliel and is in conjunction with Gamaliel affiliates across the country.

Baseline Analysis of Organizational Racism: We will develop a baseline analysis of racism within our organization that will serve to increase commitment of members to dismantle racism both within WISDOM and its affiliates and within the community.

Education and Dialogue: We will develop a shared understanding within WISDOM and its affiliates of the meaning and historical reality of systemic racism through education and dialogue.

Long Term and Short-Term Racial Equity Goals: We will be strategic and intentional in setting both long term and short-term racial equity goals and in monitoring our progress toward them by their impact, not simply our intention. (We should be able to see the progress.)

Raise up and Support Under-Represented Leaders: We will prioritize historically and systemically excluded or marginalized people by recognizing, raising up and supporting leaders from under-represented populations and intentionally creating pathways for them to be included in decision-making and leadership.

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WISDOM
2021-2023
State Budget
Priorities



Drive the Economy: Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Wisconsinites

The Problem: In 2005 the U.S. Congress passed the *Real ID Act*, requiring all states to turn driver's licenses into a federal identification card. The Real ID Act took effect in Wisconsin on April 1, 2007. Because driver's licenses are now federal ID's, they require social security numbers. *Therefore, people who are undocumented are no longer able to obtain a driver license or have any other legal way to drive a car or purchase car insurance.*

The Solution: *Alternative Driver's License for Undocumented Wisconsinites.* The federal Real ID Act allows individual states to create an *alternative* driver's license for undocumented people. These *alternative* driver's licenses cannot be used for official federal purposes such as voting, passports, etc. An *alternative* driver's license is not a driver license, but it would positively identify the card holder, ensure that driver education and tests were successfully completed, and allow a legal way for people without documents to drive to work, school, church and shopping. It would also allow for affordable car insurance.

Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Wisconsinites will:

- ***Have a Positive Financial Impact on Wisconsin.*** *The Department of Transportation estimates that extending eligibility for driver cards and identification cards to people without documents would increase revenues by \$2.9 million in the first year of implementation.* Insurance and automotive industries have lost the business of thousands of immigrants who no longer have licenses, and the DMV has lost the financial contribution of people who are now denied access to its services.
- ***Increase Public Safety.*** Licensing drivers based on ability to drive improves public safety. An *alternative* driver's license would assure immigrants access to proper road safety, driving tests, and automotive insurance. This results in safer roads and lower costs for insured drivers.
- The current climate of fear caused by lack of legal ability to drive erodes trust in local law enforcement and prevents many immigrants from reporting if they are victims or witnesses to crimes. Law enforcement remains steadfast in their support for Driver's License for Undocumented Wisconsinites because it would positively identify drivers on the street, allow law enforcement to focus on more important public safety matters, and create better relations with residents in the community.
- ***Strengthen Wisconsin Families, Communities and Economy:*** Immigrants make countless positive contributions to Wisconsin communities, schools, churches, economy, and culture. Undocumented immigrants in Wisconsin paid an estimated \$156.9 million in federal taxes and \$101.1 million in state and local taxes in 2018 (American Immigration Council).

Immigrants have kept us going during the pandemic. Possibility of a Driver's License for Undocumented Wisconsinites is an easy reward for all their hard work.

We ask the legislature to:

Keep the provision for Driver Licenses for those without documents in the 2021-23 state budget.

Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD)

In his biennial budget request Governor Evers called for an additional \$15 million in the second year for Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD). These programs currently provide treatment options as an alternative to incarceration for individuals in 53 Wisconsin counties and three tribal jurisdictions. **This proposed expansion of the TAD programs will contribute to public safety while substantially reducing the state's court and incarceration expenditures.** We urge you to retain in the budget the proposed funding increase, combined with the added flexibility given to local communities in administering the funds.

From their beginning in 2005, the evidence-based programs that receive TAD funds have been shown to reduce incarceration and prevent re-offending and, consequently, have had broad bipartisan support. The most recent evaluation, conducted by the Wisconsin State Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, covered the 6,125 people who participated in TAD programs over the five-year period 2014 to 2018. That evaluation found that 56% of program participants successfully completed treatment and avoided incarceration and were subsequently less likely to re-offend. It estimated that **for every dollar spent on drug treatment alternatives, the state saved \$4.17** in reduced incarceration and court expenditures. The cost-benefit ratio for diversion programs, which have fewer court appearances and participant needs, was even more favorable, **with the state saving \$8.68 for each dollar spent.**

Substantial as these savings are, they can be increased by expanding TAD funding and loosening the restrictions on program participation. As currently implemented, TAD programs are available only to individuals with underlying drug addiction issues. By allowing counties to compete for up to \$1 million in funding for mental health treatment courts, as the Governor's budget request provides, we can provide additional treatment options and avoid incarcerating Wisconsin citizens experiencing mental health problems.

The proposed expansion of TAD programming will contribute both to public safety and to a more cost-effective criminal justice system.

We ask the legislature to:

Include the \$15 million/year increase in TAD funding for the second year of the 2021-23 state budget and expand eligibility for TAD programming to include people with mental health needs.

Community-Based Alternatives to Revocation (ATRs)

Wisconsin's disastrous system of mass supervision is at odds with our widely shared values of justice, human dignity and compassion. Detaining people struggling with poverty, housing insecurity, mental health issues and addiction issues for alleged rule violations is at odds with common sense. Yet, public officials in Wisconsin have been keeping its prisons and jails overcrowded for many years by doubling down on this unjust practice.

Numerous studies demonstrate the deep racial injustice and extent of the harm caused by mass supervision in Wisconsin. Wisconsin now detains people for violations of supervision at the third highest rate in the nation. Over 25% of people currently incarcerated in Wisconsin prisons are there for a revocation without a new conviction. This practice of conviction-less revocation impacts Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities at highly disproportionate rates.

Probation and parole officers in Wisconsin have expressed frustration about the lack of community-based alternatives to revocation that are available. Alternatives to revocation are options that are more appropriate than revocation for people who have allegedly violated their supervision rules. For example, a person living with mental illness may be placed in a specific community-based treatment program rather than sent to prison.

Governor Evers' budget provides \$3.1 million dollars to expand options for alternatives to revocation. In order to more adequately address the need for community-based alternatives to detaining people for revocations, this amount should be expanded to at least \$15 million dollars. In addition, the community-based alternatives should be in the least restrictive environment needed to help people under supervision succeed and should not involve oppressive practices like GPS or electronic monitoring. Earlier this year, the Evers administration decided to move all of the ATR programs that were previously in Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) to community-based settings. We applaud this decision and hope to see this replicated throughout the state.

At least \$15 million dollars that the state wastes on incarcerating people for conviction-less revocations each year should be redirected to ensure that more people have opportunities to be connected with community-based treatment programs that work, living-wage employment, stable housing, and high-quality educational programs. Research demonstrates that connecting people with such opportunities will reduce the likelihood that people will return to prison and will make communities safer, stronger, and healthier.

We ask the legislature to:

Add \$3.1 million to the 2021-23 budget for community-based Alternatives to Revocation and aim to increase that amount to \$15 million with the money saved by reducing the use of incarceration for conviction-less revocations

Expand the Earned Release Program

Wisconsin's prison population has experienced astronomical growth in recent years. Between 1980 and 2016, the state's prison population increased 456% to more than 22,000 people. Many of those men and women have been sentenced into Wisconsin's Substance Abuse Program, better known as the Earned Release Program (ERP).

ERP is a six-month intensive, federally approved program designed to reduce future criminal behavior by addressing criminal thinking and substance use disorders. Currently, there are over 3,500 people on the waiting list for this program and only 750 beds. Expanding this program will give individuals necessary treatment and contribute to their positive reintegration back into society. The Earned Release Program offers cognitive-based substance abuse curricula which addresses social skills building, problem solving, family dynamics, anger management, and employability.

Between 2000 and 2016, the number of people who were admitted to Wisconsin prisons with drug convictions increased 18% -- from 2,072 to 2,448. Over that same period, the number of people admitted to prison with an opioid offense increased nearly 13-fold, growing from 78 people to 998 people. Overall, drug offenses made up 20% of new admissions to Wisconsin prisons in 2018.^{iv} According to a 2015 DOC report, Washington, Green Lake, Manitowoc, and Waupaca counties have the highest percentages of opioid abuse prison admissions; Green, Racine, Keweenaw, Rock counties for cocaine admissions; and Taylor, Bayfield, Dunn and Douglas Counties for methamphetamine admissions. Incarceration in response to conviction of a crime committed as a result of alcohol or drug addiction is only one of the many ways substance abuse negatively affects lives. A 2017 Department of Corrections report shows that 69% of admitted prisoners had a substance abuse need. Couple this with rising usage of methamphetamine, fentanyl and other drugs, and we're facing the local fallout of a national epidemic.

The Earned Release Program has several criteria for enrollment. If the judge finds the person eligible and they successfully complete the 6-month alcohol and other drug abuse treatment program, their remaining incarceration time will be converted to extended supervision and they will be released. Expanding the Earned Release Program will provide a release valve allowing those who successfully complete to return to their local support networks, to receive specialized treatment for their addictions, and remove some financial and personnel burdens from our overcrowded prison system.

We ask the legislature to:

Expand the Earned Release Program, as proposed in the Governor's budget, which will result in savings to taxpayers and reduced prison populations while making communities safer and families healthier.

Raise the Age: 17-year-olds are NOT adults

Currently, Wisconsin is one of only three states nationwide that still automatically charges all 17-year-old youth in the adult court system. This means that 17-year-olds, many of whom are still in high school, are treated as adults and denied access to the rehabilitative programs and services available in the juvenile justice system. Wisconsin has quickly fallen behind, as other states, from Louisiana to New York, are recognizing the broad, bipartisan benefits of “raising the age” of juvenile jurisdiction and bringing 17-year-olds back to their rightful place in the juvenile court system.

Benefits of raising the age extend to both young people in the system and our broader communities. For justice-involved youth, raising the age expands rehabilitation options and leads to more opportunities for a future away from the justice system. Youth in the juvenile justice system are more likely to receive individualized rehabilitative programming, which can more properly address past trauma, mental health challenges, and other underlying conditions that may have led these individuals to the juvenile justice system in the first place. This individualized care provided in the juvenile system is crucial, as 72% of males and 100% of female youth in the Wisconsin justice system suffer from mental health challenges. Youth in the adult system, on the other hand, are more likely to see this trauma compounded in adult corrections facilities, as minors incarcerated in adult facilities are exponentially more likely to be victims of sexual abuse and 36 times more likely to commit suicide compared to those in the juvenile system.

Additionally, raising the age keeps our communities safer and helps state budgets. When youth are in the juvenile system, they are 34% less likely to recidivate, which translates to fewer crimes and safer communities. Youth in the juvenile system are also significantly more likely to obtain a high school diploma and gain steady employment, which means they will spend less of their life in the justice system and more of their time as tax-paying members of the workforce. By expanding their tax base, lowering corrections spending while slashing crime rates, states that have raised the age see healthier state budgets and safer communities.

We demand smart policy that provides age-appropriate, individualized programming for our state’s young people.

We ask the legislature to:

Prioritize Raise the Age provisions in this year’s Wisconsin State Budget and appropriately fund and support counties as they bring 17-year-olds back into the juvenile court system.

Transitional Jobs

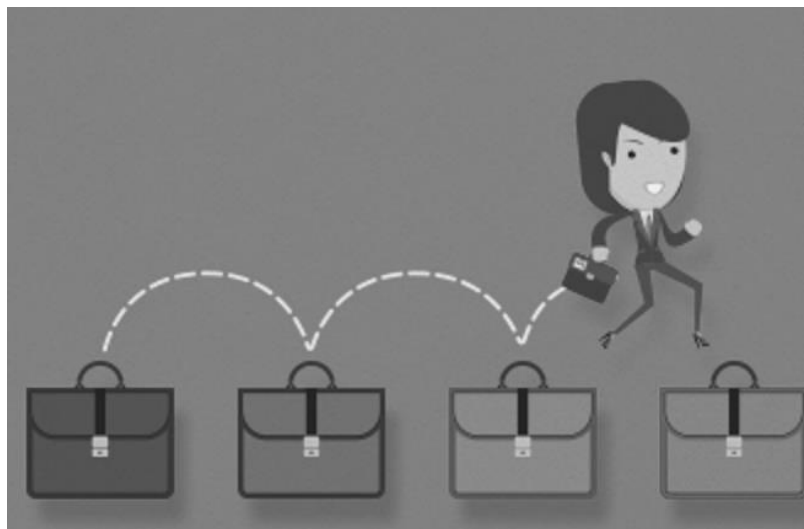
Transitional Jobs are short term subsidized jobs that are effective in getting marginalized jobseekers into work. Just under two thirds of participants go onto secure long-term unsubsidized employment and establish a firm foothold in the formal economy. Transitional Jobs typically last six months and pay minimum wage but they are an important on-ramp to better opportunities for many marginalized groups including the long term unemployed, the previously incarcerated and those isolated from economic opportunity.

Currently the state of Wisconsin spends \$9.5 million per annum on the Transform Milwaukee (\$5 million) and Transitional Jobs Programs (\$4.5 million) offering hundreds of opportunities to marginalized job seekers in Milwaukee and 22 other counties. The Governor's Budget proposes to increase funding by \$2.6 million in the first year of the biennium and \$5.2 million in the second year and to make Transitional Jobs a statewide program. **WISDOM strongly supports these changes and has been working towards the goal of Transitional Jobs being available statewide for over a decade.**

Over the years many Democrats and Republicans have been supportive of Transitional Jobs because they help to create employment and expand the workforce. In the 10 years that the Department of Children and Families has been running Transitional Jobs programs in Wisconsin more than 8,500 participants have found work through these programs increasing their economic wellbeing and the economic health of the wider community. The employers who participate in the program, many of whom are small businesses, are very positive about it.

We ask the legislature to:

Approve Governor Evers' proposal to increase funding for Transitional Jobs and to make it a statewide program for the benefit of our urban and rural communities



Childhood Lead Poisoning

No one contests the grim reality that lead poisoning can cause permanent cognitive damage, behavioral problems, higher school suspension rates, health issues, and a highly increased likelihood of being imprisoned for violent crimes. Wisconsin state statute defines lead poisoning as a level of lead in the blood of 5 or more micrograms per deciliter of blood. According to the CDC, there is no “safe” level of lead in the blood.

The Department of Health Services (DHS) stated in their *2014 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin* (p.6) that if lead poisoning in children were completely eliminated, the state would save \$7 billion in costs for medical treatments, special education, and crime and juvenile delinquency.

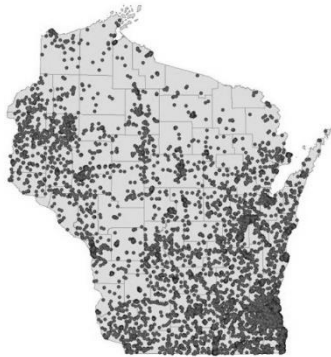


Figure 7. Addresses where children under age 6 were poisoned in Wisconsin, 1996-2016.

commitment to do so.

The above report also stated there would be an estimated \$21 billion in new earnings because of increased high school graduation rates and increased lifetime ability to earn.

Lead poisoning is a statewide tragedy. Between 1996 and 2016, lead-poisoned children were found in every Wisconsin county according to the DHS *2016 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin* (p.12) See map and image on the left.

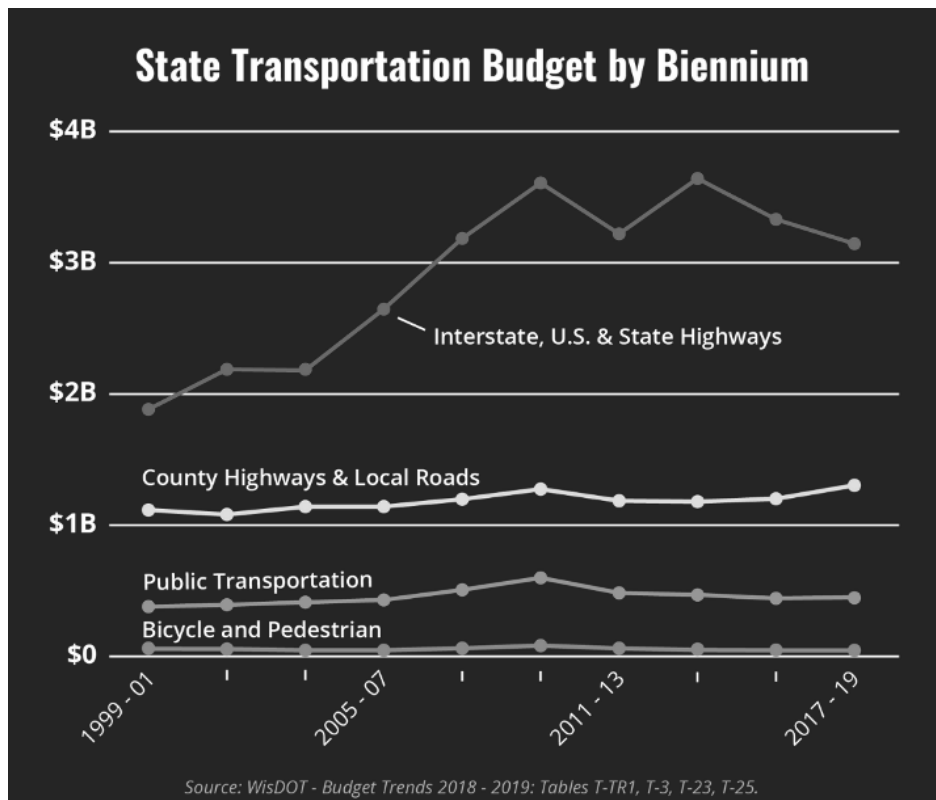
We have a moral responsibility to protect our children. Lead poisoning is 100% preventable – if we are willing to make the

We ask the legislature to maintain the following in the budget:

- 1) \$4 million annually as a state revenue match to leverage an additional \$10 million in federal dollars (CHIP) for the Lead-Safe Homes program.**
- 2) \$9.9 million increased funding in the Birth to 3 Program** to expand services to children who have a positive blood lead test at or above 5 micrograms per deciliter.
- 3) \$2 million and 1 position in ongoing funding at DHS for the Windows Plus Program** which provides lead-safe renovation to high-risk areas in homes built before 1950 that are occupied by low-income families.
- 4) \$40 million from the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program for replacement of lead service lines** (there are about 200,000 lead service lines statewide).

Transit

Decades of misplaced spending priorities have left Wisconsin's transportation infrastructure in rough shape. For the past twenty years, state leaders have spent heavily on expanding Wisconsin's major highways, often based on questionable projections and congestion reduction measures. With revenue stagnant, we have been left with fewer resources to meet urgent needs. Now, roads across the state are deteriorating – particularly at the local level – and our public transportation systems are struggling to get people to the places that matter – work, school, the doctor's office. Our focus on expanding roadway capacity has also encouraged more people to drive, worsening congestion and generating emissions harmful to public health and the environment.



We ask the legislature to:

Reject highway expansion projects: do not enumerate I-94 East-West in Milwaukee.

Increase public transportation funding by \$50m per year and increase funding for specialized transportation and paratransit, including funding for mobility managers in each county.

Reinstate Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding for walking and biking infrastructure at a rate of \$10m per year.

Affordable Housing

WISDOM and our supporters believe what the Governor believes, “that affordable, quality housing is a critical, and often missing component of economic development that affects the lives and opportunities of many people in our state and (the lack of such housing) has a negative impact on the overall economy”. In addition, we believe that the state affordable housing budget should: 1) prioritize those households earning very low and extremely low income, defined by HUD at or below 50% of the county median income and adjusted for family size, and 2) provide a path for those “locked out of housing” with high rental barriers, primarily eviction and conviction histories. Safe, quality, and affordable housing is at the core of a healthy community.

In 2019, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, 42.4 percent of Wisconsin households paid more than 30 percent of their income on rent. The state must develop programs that alleviate the cost burden that many families face in trying to rent or own their own home. Because low and extremely low-income households feel the effects the most, there is increased demand for other government assistance. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition across Wisconsin there is a shortage of rental homes affordable and available to extremely low income households (ELI), whose incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income (AMI). Severely cost burdened poor households are more likely than other renters to sacrifice other necessities like healthy food and healthcare to pay the rent, and to experience unstable housing situations like evictions. Moreover, an eviction on your record and/or a criminal conviction history can permanently “lock a person out” of being able to rent. This means that many Wisconsin individuals and families are living in overpriced and often unhealthy and unsafe hotel environments, living with friends or family, in limited shelter space, or, on the street. Frequent moves, the threat of foreclosure and eviction can also have a relationship to stress levels, feelings of hopelessness and depression.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development research indicates that seniors, individuals with disabilities and persons of color are disproportionately affected by multiple housing challenges, including affordability. In rural areas, this can be exacerbated by a lack of neighbors, services, and amenities

We Ask the Legislature:

To transfer \$20 million of the \$50 million GPR Affordable Workforce Housing Grant program at the Department of Administration to the Homelessness Prevention Budget for programs increasing access to affordable housing.

That \$10 million of this funding should be transferred in each of the following years, 2021-22 and 2022-23, for housing equity programs which are guided by impacted people, increasing access to affordable housing for those living with incomes in the low-extremely low range and with high rental barriers, primarily those with eviction and conviction histories.

Ending Child Poverty

Child poverty damages children and leads to social inequity. About 1 in 6 children in Wisconsin live in poverty based on the outdated federal poverty rate. The United Way ALICE report, which measures poverty based on the actual cost of living, estimates the poverty rate to be 1 in 3 children, or about 200% higher than federal standards.

These shortfalls in family support are especially consequential in the first five years of childhood leading to slower brain development, and poor physical and mental health, leaving children unprepared for their formal education and their transition to a successful adulthood. These children start their education at a significant disadvantage that compounds in every passing year. The reduced experiences and opportunities to learn and progress through adolescence can lead to very poor adult outcomes, another generation of poverty, and, high public costs that drastically exceed the cost of prevention.

Studies and the results of global and state programs show that investments in childhood provide huge returns to children, their families, and society at large. The greatest benefits have been shown to result from direct investments in support of families with children such as the nonrefundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

We ask the legislature to:

Support the EITC Expansion in FY22 and FY23. These costs can be more than paid for by reducing the Manufacturing and Agricultural Tax Credit for income earners over \$1M.

Support creating the Create the Child Strong program, expanding the REWARD program, and providing additional funds for TANF programs.

Support the expansion of BadgerCare to 138% of the federal poverty level to ensure affordable health care for an additional 90,900 Wisconsinites.





Environmental Justice

The 2021-23 proposed Wisconsin state budget contains a number of items that the WISDOM Environmental Justice Task Forces around the state heartily endorse. Our faith traditions compel us to care for Creation. We see it as sacred and worthy of our respect and love. We are pleased that the budget addresses many climate justices' issues that are important to us. We believe the proposal is based upon sound physical and social science. We know that these climate justice initiatives are needed to help slow down the train that is heading for environmental collapse.

We are particularly excited about the creation of an Office of Environmental Justice within the Department of Administration. We look forward to the opportunity for environmental justice advocates, communities of color, tribal nations, and low-income communities to engage with state agencies in designing policies that help to minimize the adverse consequences of climate change. The pandemic of this past year has taught us that we are all vulnerable to the unknowns of our Living Planet. Fortunately, we now have a vaccine to fight COVID 19. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine we can take against climate change, however there are policies we can now enact to address the unknown but certain adversities that lie before us.

We ask the legislature to

Invest \$500,000 in the creation of green jobs and to invest more funds in the Focus on Energy program.

Support the \$6.5 million authorization for grants to counties to implement land and water resource conservation.

Public Instruction and Education Improvement

In his biennial budget request Governor Evers called for an additional \$22.5 million in 2021-22 and \$24 million in 2022-23 for aid for school mental health programs, an additional \$3.5 million annually for grants for school collaboration with community partners to provide mental health services to pupils, and \$20 million in 2022-23 in a continuing appropriation for a new grant program to support high-quality after-school programs and other out-of-school-time programs that provide services to school-age children.

Governor Evers also called for the modification of current law to include expenditures for any pupil services professional, rather than only social workers as under current law and to define pupil services professional as a school counselor, school social worker, school psychologist, or school nurse.

Our priorities are highly aligned with these budget initiatives. We applaud the Governor's efforts to implement these and other progressive policies in support of children, families and schools. These proposed expansions of Public Instruction programming will contribute to improved services to students, particularly children in need of mental health and out-of-school-time support to children. These services will contribute to the success of all our children and help reduce undesired consequences resulting from the ill-served needs of children suffering from childhood trauma, including behavioral issues that can lead to inordinate suspensions and expulsions, which then can lead into the prison pipeline.

WISDOM joins with the Wisconsin Public Education Network and others in the hope that in this budget Wisconsin can finally move toward adequate, equitable funding for public education. A just budget will invest in closing Wisconsin's educational and racial disparity gaps, and exclude any policy or funding for programs that makes them wider.

We ask the legislature to:

Include \$47 million in mental health aid to reimburse 10% of school expenditures for social workers, counselors, psychologists and nurses and \$7 million increase for rural mental health services grants

Include the \$3.5 million increase annually for grants for school collaboration with community partners to provide mental health services to pupils.

Include the proposed \$710 million sum sufficient increase for special education, bringing the state's reimbursement of schools' special education costs from less than 30% to 50% in FY23.

Include the \$28 million increase for English language learners and expands eligibility for ELL funding and the \$20 million increase in sparsity aid for rural districts.

A Vision for 2046 – An Invitation to a Conversation

The new WISDOM Executive Committee met to discuss what we believe we should be working towards as WISDOM in the next 25 years. We challenged ourselves to imagine what will happen when we are successful in our work. This, our vision for 2046, is not a policy statement, nor do we pretend to speak for more than ourselves.

Antiracism and Reparations

We recognize that the twin “original sins” of our country were the institution of slavery and the genocide of Indigenous people along with the theft of their land. We will never live up to our own ideals until we have squarely faced the harm that has been done and until we have aggressively sought to repair the systematic and systemic damage that has been inflicted on Black and Native people.

White Supremacy and its evil results will not be repaired in a short time. This repair is the work of our lifetimes; it will require real repentance, soul searching, and difficult conversations, including a deep commitment to change in our own faith communities. As engagement in that work we can take concrete steps now to right some of the material wrongs that have been perpetrated.

Reparations means more than monetary compensation to individuals. Reparations must also include massive investment in health care, educational opportunities, job opportunities, home ownership opportunities and more for the descendants of people who were enslaved and for Indigenous people. The specifics of how to equitably make such opportunities available must come from the impacted people themselves. Communities of color need to be given the resources and the space to direct the repair that is so long overdue.

Correctional Systems Reform

We envision the closure of our prison facilities, beginning with the oldest and most outdated. The prison system as we know it will no longer exist. No longer will we invest in institutions that have punishment and control as their goal. Instead, we will follow a model of healing and restoration. Whenever harm is done, our goal must be to restore all parties to well-being.

If there is a need to deprive a human being of their liberty for their own safety or that of others, it will be for as short a period as possible, and the system will work entirely toward rehabilitation and re-integration.

We envision major investments in mental health and substance abuse treatment for all who need it as soon as they need it. We believe that there must significant investment in healing people who are victimized by others or who suffer from serious trauma. The vast majority of people in the justice system were “victims of crime” long before they ever committed a crime.

Human Rights in Schools

We envision a time when all parents will be empowered to demand that their children receive a complete education, including learning how to relate respectfully and productively with people of all races, abilities, identities, and backgrounds.

We will not eradicate racism in our society unless we address it aggressively in our schools. Solutions need to come from the “top” and from the “bottom.” The Department of Public Instruction must mandate policies that hold schools accountable, including a requirement for all schools to have and to enforce strong anti-racism policies. There must be accountability for school districts and administrators that tolerate racism by staff and/or students. Locally, race relations need to be taught in all schools, at every grade level and in every part of the state, with specific inclusive curriculum designed in partnership with parents of students of color.

Fair and Humane Treatment for Immigrants

We envision a future where the United States will be a land that celebrates and welcomes immigrants, who add so much to our culture and to our economy. We envision a time when the unification of families and the protection of persecuted people are the highest goals of our immigration system. We envision a day when the government agency overseeing immigration policy sees its primary purpose as helping people to enter the country and if desired to make a home here.

Everyone will be able to apply for a drivers’ license. Asylum seekers (whether they are fleeing the government, gangs, or other oppression) will be welcomed.

At the same time that we welcome immigrants, we will also make major investments in poorer countries so that people are not forced to migrate for economic reasons or to escape other hardship.

Voting Rights

We envision a future where every citizen is able to vote safely and securely, by mail or in person, without discriminatory barriers to registration or to participation in this most basic democratic right. No one should lose their right to vote, even if they have been convicted of a crime. Everyone is still part of the community. We envision a time when district maps are drawn by non-partisan groups and are never designed to give advantage to any political party.

The Environment

If we are to survive as a society, the next 25 years must include a major effort to stop destroying our air, earth and water. We envision a carbon neutral Wisconsin, major investments in renewable energy and in the protection of our water. Our faith traditions tell us that as human beings we have a special responsibility to be “stewards” of the earth and its resources – remembering that we are borrowing the planet from our grandchildren. We believe that must begin with humility. Our species is a newcomer; we need to recognize that the plants, the animals and the rest of the natural world were here long before us, and we have much to learn from them.

Transit/Transportation

We envision a transportation system that contributes to our goals of ecological sustainability and equity for all people. Whether or not people have a car or a driver’s license, they need to be able to get to work, to medical appointments, to worship, to shopping and recreational

venues. Public transportation needs to be extensive, convenient and affordable. It needs to make the entire community accessible to all its members. And public transportation needs to be so convenient that people with cars will choose to use it – saving the environment and re-introducing community to our travel.

Economic Justice/Housing

We envision a world without an extreme wealth gap between rich and poor. Wealth earned by workers should flow horizontally to benefit the many, not upward and concentrated in the hands of a very few. No one who works full time should live in poverty. Everyone should earn a just wage that sustains him or her and their dependents.

Access to safe, quality, and affordable housing is a human right. Everyone should have housing security, including those with existing high rental barriers such as eviction and conviction histories. We envision a world where those with evictions and/or conviction histories will be invited into restorative mediation practices instead of being “locked out” of housing opportunities.

Health Care

We envision a time when healthcare is a human right and accessible to all citizens and residents of this nation on an equal basis. No one should have to choose between medication and rent or go without necessary treatment because they lack adequate healthcare coverage. We envision the day when health outcomes and life expectancy are not determined by race, ethnicity or economic status.

Now it is your turn...

As people of faith we believe that we need to keep a bold long-term vision in view even as we work very hard to make progress today on winnable short-term issues. Does our vision for 2046 resonate with you? Is it too bold? Not bold enough? We invite everyone in WISDOM – local organizations, Core Teams, Task Forces, Religious Leaders and others to reflect with us on this question: Where do we want to be in 25 years?

The 2021 WISDOM Executive Committee:

President – Rev. Marian Boyle-Rohloff
Vice Presidents – Mr. Ron Alexander and Ms. Darnisha Garbade
Secretary – Ms. Sue Spicer
Treasurer – Mr. Bob Monahan
Financial Secretary – Ms. Ann Lacy
Immediate Past President – Rev. Willie Brisco
Staff – Mr. David Liners

The 2021 WISDOM Priorities Book Designed by:

Nancy Ruby Plascencia

WISDOM PROPHETIC DECLARATION

- We are people of faith united by our passion for justice, commitment to community and practice of hope. We stand together understanding that our lives and destinies are intertwined.
- We come together because God calls us into relationship with one another, with our communities and with the world around us.
- We come together from across the state, across faith traditions, across race, class, gender and ethnicity, and across many divides that might ordinarily keep us apart.
- We come together around core faith convictions that affirm our direction and shape our vision for the future.
- We come together to act for justice, build power and to transform our communities, cities and state.

We stand together in our faith

- We believe in the God-given dignity and infinite worth of every human life.
- We believe that we are each and all part of a sacred community, to which we have responsibility and from which we gain sustenance.
- We believe that our faith calls us to work for justice and liberation, standing against all forms of oppression and inequity.
- We believe we are called to be stewards of the natural world in all its bounty and diversity.
- We believe in shared abundance and stand against the dominant culture of reckless consumption and consumerism for some and deprivation for others.
- We believe in the triumph of love and hope over hate and fear.
- We build power and act together, drawing courage and inspiration from our faith.
- We believe God has called us to live, speak and act courageously in accordance with our faith beliefs. Together we will create the community we seek for ourselves, but also build the power we need to transform the world around us.
- We will build the relationships and strategic capacity we need to powerfully engage and impact public decisions.

Together we declare...

- Where there is division, we declare unity.
- Where there is hatred, we declare love.
- Where there is lack, we declare abundance.
- Where there is desolation, we declare renewal.
- Where there is discouragement, we declare hope.
- Where there is lack of strength, we declare power!