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Positive Budget Recommendations and Significant Room for Improvement

(Madison, WI)—We commend Governor Walker for proposing a number of important funding increases in his budget, although we also have serious concerns about some of his proposals and need to see more details about how it is financed. The Governor's recommendations include significant investments in some of the programs and services that are important for children and families, including education and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Many of those increases would help reverse cuts made in recent years.

Some of the investments the Governor is proposing are positive steps forward, but fall far short of what is needed, considering the magnitude of the problems they are intended to address. For example, tackling the drug epidemic that plagues our state will require a much larger investment in treatment programs than the Governor has proposed, though we appreciate his recognition of the problem. And we have other big problems to solve, like lead poisoning in our children. By ending some ineffective tax loopholes that almost exclusively benefit the most well-connected and have no link to job creation, the state could invest in solutions to some of its most pressing problems and do far more to boost the state economy.

One area of concern in the budget is the broad set of changes in public benefits programs, which the Governor says will help low-wage workers and boost the state economy. We support those objectives and some of his specific recommendations, but other parts of that agenda will harm families that are struggling to overcome the many obstacles that often make it very difficult for low-wage workers to maintain their employment. To bring about a significant increase in workforce participation, state policymakers need to develop a bipartisan, pro-worker agenda that more effectively minimizes impediments to work.

Though there are some parts of the budget that we oppose and others that we think are lacking, we commend Governor Walker for going much further than he has in the past to invest in children, and particularly in the state's K-12 education system. We hope there will be a bipartisan effort to build upon the foundation the Governor laid out today and improve it as the budget process progresses.

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The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a multi-issue policy research and advocacy organization promoting statewide policies that ensure a safe and healthy future for every child in Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.wccf.org.