

November 1, 2021

The Honorable Tony Evers  
Governor  
115 East Capitol  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers:

Together, as organizations across the state committed to ensuring the well-being of children, families, and communities, we write to urge you to consider using a portion of the substantial infusion of resources made available to Wisconsin through the *American Rescue Plan Act* (P.L.117-002) (ARPA) and/or any available funds to provide a meaningful and lasting increase in funding to the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board and invest in primary prevention programs and services.

Wisconsin is fortunate to have an array of effective family support primary prevention programs that are making a difference around the state and a solid infrastructure ready to take to scale. Family Resource Centers (FRCs) offer critical services in local communities such as parent education and home visiting services to enhance parenting skills, concrete supports to meet basic needs, and connect families to community resources. These essential services are foundational to building strong families and communities throughout our state. Unfortunately, current demand continues to outpace available resources and as a result, not all families have access to these programs in their local communities.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on Wisconsin's children and families. Forcing them to navigate new public health safety protocols, school closures, uncertain childcare arrangements, job losses, social isolation, and barriers to many critical support services. This has led to both a significant increase in risk factors for child abuse and neglect and demand for behavioral health and family support services across the state.

In response to these elevated risk factors, increasing protective factors to safeguard children from maltreatment, such as expanding access to programs that are proven to prevent abuse, will go a long way in reducing maltreatment (and the trauma that accompanies it) in the immediate term, and saving state resources on more costly interventions if allowed to continue unaddressed in the long term. Families across the state, regardless of education and income level, are reporting high levels of stress, financial impacts, and a reduction in mental health; they need support to recover from the distress they have and continue to experience.

As you well know, the cumulative cost of child maltreatment is significant. The cost in the U.S. per day is \$220 million, and in Wisconsin alone the lifetime economic burden of child maltreatment is presently assessed at \$4,168,765,776. Currently 17 percent of federal funds and a mere 1 percent of state/local funds is spent on preventative services in Wisconsin. In contrast, 48 percent of federal funds and 70 percent of state/local funds is spent on out-of-home placements and child protective services combined, respectively. This Administration supports investments in our kid's mental health and well-being and this is a unique opportunity for Wisconsin to

double down and demonstrate “what’s best for our kids is what’s best for our state” - realigning and increasing funding on preventative services. Shifting financial resources to primary prevention services – rather than continuing to fund government systems to intervene after avoidable adverse experiences happen for families – is essential for building stronger families, more resilient communities, saving taxpayer money, and addressing long-standing inequities.

Primary prevention programs that prevent maltreatment and strengthen families consistently demonstrate a sizeable return on investment. For example, the Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP) recently calculated that implementing Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® - a system of evidence-based parenting interventions that is already being delivered across Wisconsin - provides savings to taxpayers, participants and community members of approximately \$2,375 per participant in areas such as criminal justice, labor markets earnings, child welfare and health care with a benefit to cost ratio of \$7.78. More generally, studies show reduced rates of child abuse and neglect investigations in communities that have an FRC compared to similar communities that do not in Allegheny County, PA; and lower rates of substantiated cases and foster care placements over time when a strong network of FRCs was established in San Francisco. A social return on investment analysis conducted in Alabama found that for every \$1 invested in FRCs, there is a \$4.93 return on investment.

We urge you to meet this moment in time by committing the additional resources the Prevention Board requires to demonstrate that Wisconsin has aligned its spending with its values – that Wisconsin families matter – by recognizing the urgency of providing family strengthening and prevention services during this critical time. Doing so will help to mitigate avoidable abuse and neglect of children, an even further overwhelmed child welfare system, and an increased burden on taxpayers, who ultimately take on the resultant costs. We appreciate your consideration of this request and stand ready to be of assistance in any way.

Respectfully,

4-C

4C Family Center of Washington County

4C For Children

Alphabet Academy LLC

Burnett County Family Resource Center, Inc.

Child Care Partnership

Child Care Resource & Referral, Inc.

Childcaring, Inc.

Children’s Wisconsin

Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin

Family & Childcare Resources of N.E.W.

Family Connections

Family Connections of Southwest Wisconsin

Family Resource Center

Family Resource Center of Sheboygan County

Family Resource Center St. Croix Valley

First 5 Fox Valley

Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation  
Habitat for Humanity of Sawyer County  
Hayward Community School District  
Housing Authority County of Sawyer  
Just 4 Kidz Daycare  
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe School  
Lakeland Family Resource Center, Inc  
Little Folks Workshop  
Loris Daycare  
Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth  
Northwest Connection Family Resources  
Rooted  
Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program  
Supporting Families Together Association  
The Parenting Network  
The Parenting Place  
Tiny Toes Toddler Care  
Vilas County Department of Social Services  
Washburn County Health & Human Service Department  
Watertown Family Connections  
Westby Day Care & Learning Center, Inc.  
Wisconsin Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs  
Wisconsin Association of Family and Children's Agencies, Inc.  
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association