WISDOM STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED STATE BUDGET
March 12, 2019

WISDOM, the statewide network of justice-oriented community organizing projects, has a mixed reaction to Governor Evers’ proposed 2019-21 State Budget.

POSITIVES

Among some of the positive budget provisions that correspond to issues WISDOM has addressed are:

Drivers’ Licenses for people without a social security number:

The Governor’s budget proposes that Wisconsin join the growing number of states that make it possible for undocumented workers to obtain a valid drivers’ license. The license could not be used as a federal ID, but it could be used to drive legally. Until the federal government finally achieves comprehensive immigration reform, this is a measure that would give great peace of mind to our hard-working neighbors who need to drive for work, school, church and more.

Acceptance of Medicare Expansion

The Governor’s budget proposal would provide health care coverage for 82,000 additional Wisconsinites, and it would save Wisconsin taxpayers more than $300 million.

Increased Funding for Transit

The proposed budget would finally restore the money that was taken away from mass transit 8 years ago. While a greater commitment to transit is still needed, it would stop the cycle of reductions in bus lines. By finally increasing shared revenue, the budget also makes it easier for local communities to fund their share of transit costs.

Increased Education Funding

The budget significantly increases state funding for public schools, ensuring that quality programs can continue or even be added, and that our state can attract and retain quality teachers. Within this, it is very significant and positive that the Governor has chosen to invest $600 million in Special Education, an area where our state’s effort has been among the lowest in the country.

NEGATIVES and BROKEN PROMISES

The Governor’s proposed budget is extremely disappointing in its treatment of Criminal Justice issues. A few of the most significant problems are:

Treatment Alternatives and Diversions (TAD)

In the summer of 2018, Candidate Evers made a clear, unequivocal, written promise to WISDOM that he would include at least a $15 million per year increase in the TAD program in his first budget. In 2019, Governor Evers proposes only a $1 million increase.
TAD is a program that saves taxpayers $2 for every dollar it spends. It is widely supported by legislators and prosecutors of both political parties. Its increase is a guaranteed way to reduce the numbers of people in both state prisons and county jails.

It is very unclear why the Governor would choose this promise to break.

**Prison Expansion**

Candidate Evers clearly ran on his intention to dramatically reduce the population of Wisconsin’s prisons. Governor Evers’ budget funds a growth in the prison system.

The budget proposal seems to envision a first expansion in July of 2020, when hundreds of new beds would open up in barracks at two institutions. The Capital Budget calls for another set of barracks, and an expansion of the women’s prison of Taycheedah – and that construction would not even begin until March of 2021.

The Governor’s call for an expansion of the prison system would seem to indicate that, at least for the first three years of his term, he does not envision a reduction in the prison population. During the campaign, he agreed that he would “direct the Department of Corrections to end the use of incarceration for crimeless rule violations.” That step alone would reduce the prison population by about 4,000 within two years. The Governor also promised he would order a complete review of the status of the 3,000 parole-eligible “old law” prisoners, who have long been eligible for release but who have been stymied by a broken parole system. If he kept those promises, and the promise to significantly expand TAD, the Governor would be projecting a large decrease in the prison population, not an increase.

**Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF)**

MSDF is one of the harshest, most inhumane prisons in the nation. People locked up there can never see out a window, can never have outdoor recreation, and can never have an in-person visit from a loved one. The building has no air conditioning and is severely overcrowded. To make matters worse, about 80% of the people detained at MSDF are there only because they are on Extended Supervision and suspected of a rule violation (not a crime).

Candidate Evers promised to work with the CLOSEmsdf coalition “to develop a plan to decarcerate Wisconsin, close the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility, and re-invest resources saved to build safer, stronger and healthier communities.” Governor Evers Capital Budget has instead proposed spending $8 million for renovations of MSDF, which will not even begin until December of 2021.

With this spending on MSDF, the Governor has chosen to double down on an investment in failure. If his goal was anything other than the status quo, he surely would first have determined the future use of the building before he started remodeling plans.

These and other issues will be addressed at the WISDOM Madison Action Day on March 26, 2019.