

# Dignity at Work COALITION Wisconsin

## 2022 Voter Guide

The Dignity at Work Coalition has prepared a Voter Guide every election cycle since 2016. Over the course of these 6 years, the issues facing our state have changed very little. Though it is frustrating that partisan politics has hindered significant progress on these issues, we continue to stress the importance of educating ourselves on the topics at hand. This voter guide is non-partisan and intended to be used at candidate forums, town hall meetings, and any other venues where candidates are available for questioning.

### **Affordable Housing**

Even before COVID-19, access to affordable and equitable housing was at crisis-levels across the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin needs at least 120,000 more units that are affordable for extremely low-income people. At present, any effective action to improve this situation must come from the state legislature, since state preemption laws prohibit localities from enacting such remedies as raising the minimum wage, granting a moratorium on evictions, instituting rent control measures, allowing tenants an option to purchase, or enforcing inclusionary zoning. We expect that the fallout from the COVID-19 crisis will mean increased homelessness, foreclosures, and the buy-up of property by for-profit investment firms.

The 2021 estimated mean wage of a Wisconsin renter is around \$14/hr, yet the wage necessary to afford a 2-bedroom apartment is around \$18/hr. Though rent certificates aim to mitigate this issue, Wisconsin's household income cap for rent certificates is only \$24,680, which is below the annual income necessary to afford even a studio apartment in Wisconsin (\$25,876) and under the federal poverty threshold for a 4-person family.

#### QUESTIONS:

- What is your vision for long-term affordable housing? How would you create and/or finance it?
- What are your views on creating affordable housing in mixed-income neighborhoods near good-paying jobs, public transportation, and good schools?
- How can government ensure that anti-discrimination laws are enforced?

### **Childcare**

Childcare is essential to the Wisconsin workforce. Our state's childcare system comprises thousands of independent businesses, and parent fees primarily support them. Childcare providers set fees at what Wisconsin workers can afford and not the

true cost of the care and education. Currently, this care is 18.5% of the median income in our state, with the average cost of infant care being \$12,500, which is more than tuition in the University of Wisconsin system. The early childhood workforce is highly educated, yet average earnings are at a poverty level, just \$12.99 an hour. Nearly 50% of Wisconsin is considered a childcare desert, meaning there are three or more children for every one available slot of care in these regions. That rate reaches a staggering 70% in rural parts of our state. When Wisconsin parents cannot work to their full ability due to lack of access to high-quality and affordable childcare, the Wisconsin economy suffers.

QUESTION:

- What role do you believe federal, state, and local governments have in making early childcare accessible and affordable to working families now and in the long term?

## **Criminal Justice Reform**

Prisons are the third most expensive item in our state budget, and Wisconsin incarcerates a higher percentage of our population than does any neighboring state and spends 12% more on prisons than the national average. Over 3,000 Wisconsinites are returned to prison each year not for committing a new crime, but for violating a rule of supervision – i.e. violating a condition of probation or parole. These technical revocations cost taxpayers \$197 million dollars a year.

QUESTION:

- How would you reform the criminal justice system so that it can function both more fairly and more economically?

## **Health Care**

Everyone, regardless of employment, immigration, race, economic, or marital status should have access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage. This pandemic shows us that we are all only as well as those who are most vulnerable. There is great need to protect and expand health care coverage, access, and affordability for Wisconsin's kids and families. 330,000 Wisconsinites do not currently have health insurance, including nearly 50,000 children. Wisconsin's partial approach to Medicaid expansion has been insufficient. It leaves us all paying more to cover fewer people, and our failure to expand Medicaid helps to perpetuate inequities in insurance coverage. States that chose to fully expand Medicaid increased the portion of people with insurance significantly more than states that refused to expand health insurance through Medicaid, including Wisconsin. We must also resist cuts to Wisconsin's Medicaid program, which would undermine its ability to respond to growing health needs due to the pandemic or its capacity to provide critical doctor-recommended services for children, families, people with disabilities and older adults.

QUESTIONS:

- What is your position on fully expanding Medicaid to 138% of the federal poverty level (about \$2,000 per month for a parent with one child)?

- What is your view on continuing to fully fund Medicaid during the next biennial state budget?
- What is your view on creating an option for lower-income people to buy into Wisconsin's Medicaid program to get affordable comprehensive health insurance?

## **Living Wage**

The living wage is what a household must earn to afford basic necessities such as food, childcare, healthcare, housing, and transportation. Until 1968, the minimum wage not only kept pace with inflation, it rose in step with worker productivity. For over 50 years and since 1968, the minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation. For over a decade, the minimum wage has been stagnant at \$7.25 per hour, and the tipped wage for service workers is \$2.33 per hour. Yet, for a family with 2 children with both parents working in Dane County, the living wage should be \$24.28 per hour. If the minimum wage had risen with productivity growth, it would be over \$24 per hour nationally. Though rural areas boast their affordability compared to Madison and Milwaukee, the difference is slight (less than \$4/hr) and the lack of transportation and high-quality jobs add their own challenges and expenses.

For some comparison, living wages for a family with 2 children and both parents working varies only slightly throughout the state.

- Jefferson County: \$21.06
- Janesville-Beloit area: \$20.73
- Milwaukee: \$22.52

### QUESTION:

- What is your position on raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation?

## **Paid Family and Sick Leave**

Workers should not be forced to choose between their economic security and their health, or the health of a loved one. But without paid family and sick leave, workers may not be able to stay home from work when they are sick or someone in their family needs care. Getting sick can have disastrous consequences for workers of color. More than half of Latinx workers and nearly 4 out of 10 of Black workers are blocked from earning even a single paid sick day at their jobs. These workers typically are paid less and have access to less wealth than White workers, so getting a paycheck docked or losing a job due to illness can be devastating.

### QUESTION:

- What is your position on requiring employers to provide paid family leave and paid sick leave?

## **Photo ID for Voting**

Wisconsin has one of the most restrictive photo ID laws in the nation. The most common form of photo ID for voting is a driver's license; however, over 30% of Wisconsin adults are non-drivers. This includes many people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals. Many do

not have other acceptable photo ID such as a Wisconsin state ID, US passport, military ID, tribal ID, or some student IDs (a photo identification card issued by a Wisconsin accredited university or college that contains date of issuance, signature of student, and an expiration date no later than two years after date of issuance).

While a free ID for voting can be obtained at Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) offices, many people who need a photo ID have very limited access to transportation, especially accessible transportation. This is especially difficult in rural areas where many DMV locations have limited hours, are open only a couple of days a week, and may be at a significant distance with travel times in excess of 40 minutes each way. In addition, many people struggle to provide a copy of their birth certificate and other needed documentation. The ID and Identification Card Petition Process (IDPP) may allow them to get a temporary free ID for voting while they gather the needed documents.

Wisconsin could expand acceptable photo ID options for voting purposes to be inclusive of non-drivers. Some options to consider are: Any photo ID card issued by the federal government, the state of Wisconsin, or a Wisconsin county, local government, or other governmental entity; regular college and university ID cards from all WI colleges and technical schools; high school student photo ID cards, and an affidavit for voters who have reasonable impediments to obtaining a photo ID. The affidavit option would be offered at polling places and early voting sites, and allow a voter to complete an affidavit of affirmation in lieu of photo ID. It could include the elector's residential address and date of birth, and have the elector sign a statement under penalty of false statement affirming their identity. According to the National Council of State Legislators website, the affidavit option is available in a number of states, including Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Michigan, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and South Dakota.

#### QUESTION:

- What is your plan to expand options for Wisconsin residents to obtain this important documentation and to address these barriers?

## **Right to Organize**

The right to join or form a union is fundamental to democracy. Through organizing, collective bargaining, and direct action, unionized workers have improved their working conditions, provided healthcare protections, fought for paid leave, and won childcare provisions. Many labor laws and workers' rights have been eroded or are not enforced. For example, employers, corporations, and CEOs steal \$15 billion a year from workers by paying them less than the minimum wage or not paying them at all. Since 2017, millions of workers have lost \$5.2 billion in foregone overtime wages, with Wisconsin workers losing about \$115 million. Other workers in construction, service industries, and the 'gig' economy 'independent contractors' have been misclassified, bringing down wages even further.

Nearly 25 million workers must waive their right to a class action lawsuit or joint arbitration. Millions of more workers, including public sector workers who deal with public safety, do not

have a voice over safe working conditions, even during an unprecedented pandemic. Many of these workers are not allowed to unionize. Those who attempt to unionize are too often retaliated against, or even terminated from employment. For those who are in unions, the right to strike provides a fundamental counter measure to balancing power in the workplace. Low wage workers, including fast food workers and agricultural workers, depend on support from other workers and the community. These workers cannot afford long strikes.

The [Protecting the Right to Organize \(PRO\) Act](#) seeks to remedy some of these power imbalances by making it easier for contracted workers to unionize, punishing employers for retaliating against unionizing workers, and could potentially eradicate right-to-work laws. The PRO Act has been stalled in the US Senate since March of 2021, as corporations have poured in millions of dollars to prevent its passage.

#### QUESTIONS:

- What is your position on holding corporations and corporate executives personally accountable for interfering with organizing efforts and violations of other labor laws?
- What is your position on providing a federal guarantee for public sector workers to bargain over wages, benefits, and working conditions, including worker safety? What is your position on banning state laws that prohibit unions from collecting dues from all workers who benefit from union representation that unions are legally obligated to provide?
- What is your position on the right to strike and other forms of direct action, including intermittent strikes and secondary boycotts?

## **Transportation**

The need for local road repairs and for accessible and affordable public transportation is great. Both people who are unable to drive due to disability or age, and people who are unable to afford a car, rely on public transportation. For all Wisconsin residents, public transportation provides an important connection to jobs, healthcare, other services, and entertainment. But many transit systems are facing potential cuts to service territory or route frequency due to lack of funding. Meanwhile, the state continues to prioritize funding intrastate highway expansion projects over local road repairs and public transportation improvements.

#### QUESTION:

- What is your position on funding highway expansion projects vs. local transit such as public transportation, local roads, bikes, and pedestrian infrastructure?

## **Unemployment Insurance**

Almost 90 years ago, Wisconsin created the first system of unemployment benefits in the United States, but we are no longer a national leader. The COVID-19 pandemic and the recession it caused have put huge strains on unemployment insurance (UI) systems across the country and have exposed many serious deficiencies in Wisconsin's program. Wisconsin policymakers need to make broad reforms in our state's UI system. The needed reforms include replacing the antiquated computer system that runs the program, streamlining the process for receiving

benefits, increasing the maximum weekly payment, expanding eligibility for people working in the gig economy, eliminating the one-week waiting period for eligibility, and providing sufficient staffing to administer the program.

QUESTION:

- What is your position on reforming the Unemployment Insurance Program?