**Senate Democratic Leader Melissa Agard’s Vision for Wisconsin**

*By: Senator Melissa Agard*

The people of Wisconsin have made their voices resoundingly clear. Wisconsinites overwhelmingly support progressive, pragmatic, and common-sense policies that make our communities safer, individuals healthier, and people more prosperous.

Regardless of constituency, legislators continue to hear that we must do more to ensure that all people have access to clean air and safe water, that people can live free from gun violence, that the color of a person’s skin does not dictate their ability to achieve their dreams, that a person’s access to healthcare and prescription medicine is not determined by their zip code or gender, and that our voting rights and our democracy are defended. I hear them, my Democratic colleagues hear them, the Governor hears them, and we are determined to ensure that our government works for the people of Wisconsin.

Over the past few months, I’ve had the unique opportunity to travel across Wisconsin and speak to the fabulous people of our state, from De Pere to Eau Claire and beyond. The issues that I hear about from folks living in more rural areas are not that much different than what I hear when talking to people in Milwaukee or Madison. Wisconsinites are worried about the quality of the air and water, farmers are concerned about preserving their heritage, hardworking people are troubled by rising costs at the grocery store, and parents are worried about the support currently provided to our public schools.

Simply put, the people of Wisconsin do not care if there is an “R” or “D” behind the name of their elected officials, they care about supporting their families, living in safe communities, building a meaningful life for themselves, and protecting and preserving our proud Wisconsin way.

During the 2023-24 legislative session, my Democratic colleagues and I will pursue policy changes and be guided by a vision that reflects the values and will of Wisconsinites. And even better yet, we have the ability to deliver on each of these items because under Governor Evers’ leadership, our state’s financial standing is strong. With a near $6.6 billion dollar surplus, long gone are the days when my colleagues on the other side of the aisle reject our investment proposals by saying, “but how will we afford that?”

The State Legislature is heading into the biennial budget process with a $6.6 billion surplus. We have a great opportunity during the upcoming legislative session to support our local governments, invest in programs and services that prioritize public safety, as well as provide a substantial tax return to Wisconsinites. Our state’s budget surplus must be given back to our communities and returned to the pockets of hardworking Wisconsinites.

Now is the time to hold true to our Wisconsin values and carry out the work that the people of our state elected us to do. With thoughtful deliberation and responsible planning, we can ensure that the ordinary people, Main Street businesses, and local communities throughout Wisconsin are better represented and better served by a government that hears them and works for them. Along with my Senate Democratic colleagues, I’m ready to roll up my sleeves and get to work for the people of our state. We will work tirelessly to bring the voices of all Wisconsinites to the State Capitol.