



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

May 1, 2020

DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY

Speaker Robin Vos  
PO Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Speaker Vos,

Two weeks ago, *2019 Act 185* was signed into law by Governor Evers. This bipartisan legislation was a positive first step in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in Wisconsin. Wisconsin families will be helped immediately by suspending the one-week waiting period for unemployment insurance and the additional federal resources our state will receive under the bill.

We appreciate the fact that the vote on this bill was overwhelmingly bipartisan, and that leadership on both sides of the aisle contributed to the legislation. The people of Wisconsin are looking for leadership, not politics, during this unprecedented moment in our state's history.

Despite the positive provisions in *Act 185*, there are critical needs that remain unmet, and more work to be done to get Wisconsin through this public health and economic crisis. On April 1st, legislative Democrats sent you a letter outlining our priorities in addressing COVID-19 in Wisconsin. While some of the policies we laid out were adopted in *Act 185*, others were not included, including policies that support Wisconsin workers, small businesses, first responders, and farmers. In addition, many of the key policies included in the bill expire on May 11, at the end of the Governor's 60-day Emergency declaration. We all know that the public health and economic crises will extend well beyond May 11, and so should these policies passed two weeks ago.

Today, we are calling on you to bring the Assembly back into session to extend the bipartisan efforts we worked on over the past month. Governor Evers and Legislative Democrats have proposals ready that should garner widespread support as they are aimed at helping Wisconsin families. While we should proceed realistically based on state revenue, we know many challenges continue to face the institutions and people of our state and we must be ready to address them. No politics, let's just work to make sure our state government is doing everything it can to help our constituents through this unprecedented crisis.

## **Extend the Governor's Public Health Emergency**

Many of the most important provisions passed in *Act 185* will expire at the end of the public health emergency May 11<sup>th</sup>. The Governor will need the tools and flexibility to manage this crisis for some time to come. And it is our hope that the Legislature will not stand in the way of any future order deemed necessary by the Administration. Meeting to extend the provisions included in *Act 185* set to expire on May 11 is the least we should do. Several important provisions of the bill were tied to the emergency order and will expire well before the immediate health and economic challenges will dissipate. We cannot address long-term problems

with short-term solutions. We believe it is important to extend these policies through the end of the calendar year, if not longer. Some of these include:

- Suspending Work-Share Plan requirements that give employers flexibility in operating to both keep people employed AND ease the burden on our unemployment insurance system.
- Makes prescription drug refills more accessible during the public health emergency.
- Creates equity in cost for individuals who receive services outside their health network, meaning it reduces the chance of surprise medical bills.
- Allows the Joint Finance Committee to transfer up to \$75 million in funds to help meet the needs of the public health emergency (plus 90 days).
- Allow local units of government to delay property tax filing deadlines for small businesses.
- Allow for a delay in interest and penalties for late payment of taxes, providing some financial flexibility for small businesses.

Below are items that the legislature should consider immediately that were not addressed in *Act 185*. Some of these items were offered as amendments during our Assembly floor session on Tuesday, April 14th. Others were outline in our list of priorities sent to you on April 1. We believe it is imperative that the legislature meet soon to pass a second relief bill aimed at supporting the people of Wisconsin and small businesses that are struggling now.

### **Small Businesses**

#### *Expand access to low-interest, long-term loans and grants for small businesses*

Provide state grants and low-interest, long-term loans to small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the recently passed federal package will provide assistance to many small businesses, we should look for opportunities to keep businesses afloat and incentivize assistance loans made to small businesses for retention of workers. Democrats offered an amendment to AB 1038 to provide \$30 million in immediate relief for small businesses that are struggling, aimed at keeping workers employed and avoiding mass layoffs.

If the Evers Administration and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) request funding through the \$75 million allocated to the Joint Finance Committee (under Act 185), it is our hope they will approve this funding. If not, the state should consider supplemental support to businesses left out of federal assistance.

### **Front-line Workers**

#### *Support our healthcare heroes*

Our frontline healthcare workers -- including hospital workers, nursing home workers, and first responders - - are risking their health every day to care for the people of our state. We must ensure that our frontline healthcare workers have the necessary protection and support to continue their service on the frontlines of this pandemic. We should provide hazard pay and full health coverage without out-of-pocket costs to healthcare workers, and ensure fully-paid sick time for healthcare workers who contract or are exposed to COVID-19. We must also ensure the financial stability of frontline workers by creating an Essential Worker Tax Credit which will strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit.

#### *Support critical workforce child care providers*

It is critical to support the child care providers who are providing care for the children of those on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, including healthcare workers and other critical workforce members. Democrats

offered an amendment to create a grant program for critical workforce child care costs, to provide hazard pay for child care providers, and to provide grants for child care providers that cease operating during the public health emergency.

## **Farmers and Agricultural Producers**

Our state's farmers and agricultural producers have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. While pending federal aid is a good first step in helping Wisconsin farmers, it will still not be enough for too many struggling farmers. The Assembly passed bills in February that would provide much-needed support for our farmers and now the Senate must act.

## **Health Care Costs**

Federal and State legislation already prevent out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 tests for those with health insurance. This same protection should be extended to those who are currently without insurance coverage. Testing for COVID-19 is a public health measure, and there should be no cost associated with such efforts. Recent news reports have highlighted people receiving a bill for a COVID-19 test. The legislature needs to reinforce that this practice must stop.

## **Housing**

*Protect businesses and single-family renters from eviction*

Ensure that workers and businesses impacted by unexpected job losses and lost revenue are not evicted during the public health emergency, providing housing security for families and protecting public health. It is crucial that people and small businesses impacted by the crisis do not face eviction due to forces beyond their control.

## **K-12 Education**

We must ensure teacher and school employees remain financially secure by requiring school boards to continue to pay and provide benefits for teachers and other employees during the public health emergency, at their regular rates and hours.

## **Supporting Wisconsin's Tourism Industry**

Our state's tourism industry was one of the first hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the state looks to reopening after the pandemic, the tourism industry will be an integral part of our state's recovery. Democrats offered an amendment to AB 1038 to provide \$5 million to support the tourism industry in our state, including \$2 million for a new regional destination marketing grant program.

## **Supporting UW Students and Campuses**

UW System institutions play an important role in creating our future workforce. Once we are through the worst of this crisis, we will look to our UW System schools to help restart our economy with their expertise and ability to produce highly skilled, educated workers. Democrats offered an amendment to AB 1038 to provide \$59 million in emergency aid to support our UW System students and campuses. Our amendment used this dollar figure based on the current shortfall.

This is an issue that needs attention if we are going to have opportunities for people displaced by the economic downturn looking to return to school to gain new skills. During the last recession we saw an increase in enrollment. We must be prepared to increase capacity as we prepare for a post-COVID world in which people are seeking new skills and opportunities.

## Elections

We must ensure that our elections in May, August, and November are safe, smooth and secure. Implementing a Vote by Mail system makes the most sense to ensure people do not have to make the impossible choice between their health and their right to vote. At the very least we should be soliciting input from the Wisconsin Elections Commission on the resources they need to accommodate the increased demand for absentee voting that we witnessed on April 7, and will undoubtedly see again in August and November.

As you can see, there is no shortage of issues that we need to address as a legislature. If we do not meet again to act in the best interest of the people of our state, we are failing in our duty as elected officials. Legislative Democrats are ready to work in a bipartisan manner to ensure we emerge from this crisis stronger and more united than before.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Representative Gordon Hintz



Representative Dianne Hesselbein



Representative Mark Spreitzer



Representative Steve Doyle



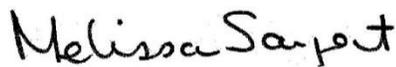
Representative Evan Goyke



Representative David Crowley



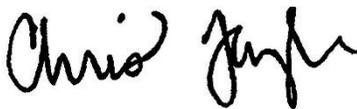
Representative Debra Kolste



Representative Melissa Sargent



Representative Daniel Riemer



Representative Chris Taylor



Representative Jodi Emerson



Representative Don Vruwink



Representative Lisa Subeck



Representative Greta Neubauer



Representative Tod Ohnstad



Representative Sondy Pope



Representative Robyn Vining



Representative Beth Meyers



Representative Tip McGuire



Representative Christine Sinicki



Representative Shelia Stubbs



Representative Nick Milroy



Representative JoCasta Zamarripa



Representative Jimmy Anderson



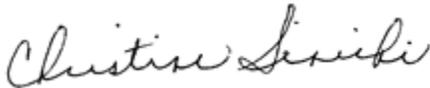
Representative Gary Hebl



Representative Jonathan Brostoff



Representative Katrina Shankland



Representative Christine Sinicki



Representative Kalan Haywood



Representative Jill Billings



Representative David Bowen