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STATE SENATOR TWENTY-SECOND DISTRICT

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Wirch Supports Evers's Special Session on Child Care, Workforce Challenges

Madison – Earlier today, Governor Tony Evers called a Special Session of the Legislature to deal with the state's child care crisis and workforce challenges. State Senator Bob Wirch (D-Somers) issued the following statement on the Governor's action.

"I am pleased that the Governor recognizes the urgent nature of these workforce issues, particularly the growing child care crisis. With a record surplus, we had a chance to address these needs in the budget. Unfortunately, the Republican majority rejected a number of commonsense proposals that had clear public support. With this special session, Governor Evers is giving them a 'do-over'. I hope they take advantage of this opportunity to get it right this time," Wirch said.

Wisconsin's early child care industry has been headed toward crisis prior to the pandemic; Covid-19 exacerbated the problems of tight profit margins and low wage workers leaving the industry. The bottom would likely have fallen out without the Child Care Counts program. Governor Evers created the program early in the pandemic, and it provided the financial stability needed to help more than 3,300 providers stay open; recruit and retain more than 22,000 staff; and continue delivering quality care to more than 113,000 Wisconsin children. The program is only funded through the end of this year. Evers had proposed a \$340 million investment in the program as part of his 2023 state budget, but that was removed by the Republican majority on the Joint Finance Committee (JFC). Democrats in both the Senate and Assembly offered amendments to restore program funding in the budget, but those were also voted down by Republicans. Without continuation of the state investment, it's believed that 25% of Wisconsin's daycare businesses will be forced to close; others will face increased rates, a reduction in wages, and layoffs. Parents will be priced out of child care, further depleting an already tight labor force.

"This is a child care issue; this is an education issue; this is a workforce issue. Rural areas will be hurt, just as urban areas will. So far, Republicans have not taken this issue seriously. What are they going to say to parents – and employers – in their districts when they become child care deserts? Let's do something now," said Wirch.

The Governor's Special Session call includes several other provisions that would benefit working families and businesses in need of qualified employees, such as paid family and medical leave; investments in higher education to help educate, train, retain and recruit talented workers; and significant investments to address healthcare and education workforce shortages. The Special Session, as ordered by Evers, will begin at noon on Wednesday, September 20, 2023.

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