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Republicans Put Immediate End to Special Session, Leaving Child Care Providers and Working Families in the Lurch

Madison – Governor Tony Evers called a Special Session of the Legislature to address the state’s child care crisis and other workforce initiatives, beginning today at noon. However, when the clock struck 12, Sen. Chris Kapenga (R-Delafield), the Senate President, “gaveled in” to start the Special Session and immediately “gaveled out”, over the objection of Democrats in the Chamber, to put an end to it without a moment of debate on these critical issues. Senator Bob Wirch (D-Somers) had this to say about the Special Sessions and Republican obstruction:

“Well, here we are again. Another special session on an issue important to the people of Wisconsin, another roadblock by the Republican majority. We are on the clock here. Child Care Counts funding runs out at the end of this year. Providers and advocates have been warning us for months that without this program, some of them will have to raise rates and others will be forced to close. Working families throughout Wisconsin can’t afford to lose their child care provider, and employers can’t afford to lose workers,” Wirch said.

The Child Care Counts program was started by Governor Tony Evers, using federal Covid funds, early on in the pandemic. The program provided the financial stability needed for 3,300 providers to stay open; recruit and retain more than 22,000 staff; and continue delivering quality care to more than 113,000 Wisconsin children. Funding for the program expires at the end of 2023. In his 2023 state budget proposal, Governor Evers included a \$340 million state investment in Child Care Counts, but the Republican majority on the Joint Finance Committee eliminated the allocation from the final budget bill. Without continuation of the program, it is estimated that 25% of Wisconsin’s child care facilities will be forced to close, while others will likely have to raise rates, reduce wages or lay off employees. Some parents will be priced out of child care, further depleting an already tight labor pool.

The Special Session call also included a bill creating a paid family leave program. Like Child Care Counts, paid family leave was included in the Governor’s 2023 state budget proposal but was removed by Republicans.

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