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## **Republicans Scapegoat Struggling Families to Score Political Points**

MADISON – The Wisconsin State Assembly met in full session to consider a pair of bills including Assembly Bill 336 (AB 336). AB 336 discontinues all supplementary unemployment insurance (UI) programs created to address the hardships caused by the current pandemic. These programs are currently slated to end on September 6, 2021. The bill also prohibits DWD from waiving the work search requirement for unemployment benefits for any reason that is related to COVID-19 or a public health emergency that is related to COVID-19.

“Rather than taking away necessary aid during a pandemic, we should provide people with the economic tools needed to ensure sustained employment for the advantage of all families and businesses,” said Representative Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton). “I don’t believe AB 336 is a sound response to the labor shortage without considering the greater issues preventing Wisconsinites from getting family-supporting jobs.”

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in February 2020, Wisconsin’s unemployment rate was 3.3%. Wisconsin’s unemployment rate returned to 3.9% in April 2021. State economists note that the labor shortage both before the pandemic and now is largely due to demographics rather than the temporary additional benefits struggling Wisconsinites are receiving.

“One of the consistent challenges to workers finding suitable employment is quality child care. These federal benefits are circulating \$650 million into local economies that have allowed families to catch up on health costs, rent, and utility bills. If this bill is signed into law, that consumer spending would cease immediately,” Representative Hesselbein continued.

In an effort to address child care access, Assembly Democrats offered an amendment with a child care quality improvement program, a health care recruitment initiative, and workforce training program grants. Assembly Republicans decided not to adopt the common-sense proposal.

“I want to find effective solutions to our unemployment issues as a state, rather than cutting off necessary aid early for workers who lost their job as a result of this unanticipated health crisis. This is not a new problem, but we need innovative ideas and a policy to solve it,” concluded Representative Hesselbein.

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