

Statement In Response to the Dane County
Department of Human Services Proposed Budget
Public Hearing, September 8, 2009

The League of Women Voters of Dane County requests that in developing the Dane County Budget for 2010, the County Executive and County Board of Supervisors do not balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens who need our protection and support.

We understand that restoring the 3% cut to purchase of service agencies (POS), restoring the cost of living increase (COLA), and funding the living wage increase, would cost the average home approximately \$1 a month. The League of Women Voters believes the citizens of Dane County are willing to make this investment for our most vulnerable.

We regret the 3% across-the-board cut to the POS agencies, and the disregard of the COLA from the base of the budget which supervisors fought for last year!! Taking away the funds for the living wage is another blow that puts these agencies in a precarious position. We want and need these agencies to be strong so they can perform the necessary services which keep our most vulnerable citizens safe and in good health. In addition, the Human Services Department has lost 13.7 positions, two of which are Joining Forces for Families social workers who work in neighborhoods helping to prevent serious and costly problems.

We understand the constraints placed on the county due to reduced state and federal funding and we know that the Department of Human Services staff worked with sensitivity and diligence to prepare a budget that stays within limitations but one that still tries to uphold the quality of services. Unfortunately, both quality and adequacy of service continue to erode at a time when strong social services are needed more than ever because of current economic conditions.

The cuts currently proposed because of economic realities could more easily be absorbed by the agencies, without undue stress on the children and adults they serve, if POS agencies' funding had kept even with inflation in years past. In 2008, the League reported that since 1990, POS agencies had lost 39% of the money needed to cover additional costs due to inflation. During those years funding was already inadequate to meet the demands placed on agencies due to an increased need for services.

The League supports a strong safety net for Dane County citizens, with less reliance on the Sheriff's department to react to those who cause harm to themselves and others. We urge county officials to prepare a budget that demonstrates County officials' desire to invest in human capital by providing as many resources as possible for those residents needing basic services so they can grow to be contributing members of our society. Expenditures for human services are essential for bringing disadvantaged people out of poverty and into productivity.

In 2007, according to the American Community Survey, data shows the percentage of children in Dane County under 18 years of age in poverty is 9.2%, or 9,160 children. Recent studies and recommendations for assuring Wisconsin's future prosperity advise helping low-income families and disadvantaged individuals to improve their health and nutrition, take advantage of educational opportunities, develop goals, find employment, and become productive members of their families and society. The necessary assistance must come largely from County services.

Maintaining General Purpose Revenue (GPR) at the 2009 level is not adequate. We would prefer that any increase in funding come from the County's share of the State Income Tax, and we will continue to press for reform of the Wisconsin Tax System. That road, however, as we all know, is not a viable option at this time. Therefore, the League again requests an increase in county taxes to meet the urgency of needs in Dane County.