



Voter's Guide for Every Working Person 2020

The Dignity at Work Coalition seeks to establish higher standards of respect and equality for all who labor, greater compassion for working families, and to foster community solidarity in the service of our mission. As Election Day draws near, it becomes imperative that we educate ourselves on the urgent issues facing our state and question our candidates on where they stand and how they intend to address these issues. Please use this non-partisan voter guide as a resource to help you learn the issues and pose important questions to your candidates. This guide can be used at candidate forums, town hall meetings, and any other venues where candidates are available for questioning.

www.dignityatworkcoalition.org/

Affordable Housing

Even before COVID-19, access to affordable and equitable housing was at crisis-levels across the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin needs at least 120,000 more units that are affordable for extremely low-income people. At present, any effective action to improve this situation must come from the state legislature, since state preemption laws prohibit localities from enacting such remedies as raising the minimum wage, granting a moratorium on evictions, instituting rent control measures, allowing tenants an option to purchase, or enforcing inclusionary zoning. We expect that the fallout from the COVID-19 crisis will mean increased homelessness, foreclosures, and the buy-up of property by for-profit investment firms.

QUESTION: What is your vision for long-term affordable housing? How would you create and/or finance it?

For more information on housing in Wisconsin:

<https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/wisconsin>; <https://tinyurl.com/WIhousingfacts>

Childcare

Childcare creates jobs in our state and is an essential support to working families, who need all available wage earners to make ends meet. Yet working families struggle to pay tuition, since childcare can cost annually as much or more than in-state college tuition. These working families include childcare workers themselves, who are mainly women, and who are engaged in one of the poorest paid occupations in the nation. This industry has been hard hit by COVID-19, with Wisconsin losing over 40% of its childcare slots since March 2020. Surveys by the National Association for the Education of Young Children predict a dire outcome should existing trends continue - nearly 80% of childcare programs could close in a year's time unless they receive federal or state stabilization funding. The lack of available childcare has a ripple effect on our economy, affecting both parents' ability to stay in the workforce and K-12 schools' ability to offer virtual or hybrid education.

QUESTION: What role do you believe federal, state, and local governments have in making early childcare accessible and affordable to working families now and in the long term?

Criminal Justice Reform

Prisons are the third most expensive item in our state budget, and Wisconsin incarcerates a higher percentage of our population than does any neighboring state. Over 3,000 Wisconsinites are returned to prison each year not for committing a new crime, but for violating a rule of supervision – i.e. violating a condition of probation or parole. These technical revocations cost taxpayers \$197 million dollars a year.

QUESTION: How would you reform the criminal justice system so that it can function both more fairly and more economically?

Driver Licenses for All

Allowing all immigrants to obtain driver licenses — regardless of immigration status — would bring broad-based benefits to Wisconsin's economy and boost families, communities, and businesses across the state. Permitting all immigrants to obtain licenses would make Wisconsin highways safer, result in insurance savings for a broad pool of drivers, and help businesses connect with workers who have skill sets that match employer needs. If lawmakers allowed all immigrants to get driver licenses, an estimated 32,000 residents of Wisconsin would gain licenses, with 12,000 of those residents living with children who are U.S. citizens.

Additionally, many potential workers have lost their driver licenses for failing to pay fines — often for minor offenses like not paying a parking ticket — or for being behind on their child support payments. Being able to drive a car legally can be the determining factor in finding a job or being unemployed.

QUESTION: What is your position on legal drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants and limiting license suspensions to offenses related to dangerous driving?

Family Caregiver Support

Over 60% of family caregivers report working while caregiving and nearly two-thirds have experienced at least one work-related impact. Wisconsin has nearly 600,000 family caregivers. The family caregiver role has become increasingly complex and has expanded to often include a growing number of medical tasks. The COVID-19 pandemic has served to further increase strain on family caregivers as they try to balance work, their own health and safety needs, and the increased care needs of a loved one(s).

QUESTION: What role do you believe federal, state and local governments could play in supporting family caregivers to enable them to continue to provide care for a loved one without risking economic insecurity from job loss, reduced hours, or gaps in employment?

Health Care

Everyone, regardless of employment, immigration, race, economic, or marital status should have access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage. This pandemic shows us that we are all only as well as those who are most vulnerable. There is great need to protect and expand health care coverage, access, and affordability for Wisconsin's kids and families. 330,000 Wisconsinites do not currently have health insurance. Wisconsin's partial approach to Medicaid expansion has been insufficient. It leaves us all paying more to cover fewer people, and our failure to expand Medicaid helps to perpetuate inequities in insurance coverage. States that chose to fully expand Medicaid increased the portion of people with insurance significantly more than states that refused to expand health insurance through Medicaid, including Wisconsin.

We must also resist cuts to Wisconsin's Medicaid program, which would undermine its ability to respond to growing health needs due to the pandemic or its capacity to provide critical doctor-recommended services for children, families, people with disabilities and older adults.

QUESTIONS:

- What is your position on fully expanding Medicaid to 138% of the federal poverty level (about \$2,000 per month for a parent with one child)?
- What is your view on continuing to fully fund Medicaid during the next biennial state budget?
- What is your view on creating an option for lower-income people to buy into Wisconsin's Medicaid program to get affordable comprehensive health insurance?

Living Wage

The Living Wage is what a household must earn to afford basic necessities such as food, childcare, healthcare, housing, and transportation. Until 1968, the minimum wage not only kept pace with inflation, it rose in step with worker productivity. For over 50 years and since 1968, the minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation. For over a decade, the minimum wage has been stagnant at \$7.25 per hour, and the tipped wage for service workers is \$2.33 per hour. Yet,

for a family of 2 in Dane County, the living wage should be \$26.86 per hour. If the minimum wage had risen with productivity growth, it would be over \$24 per hour nationally.

QUESTION: What is your position on raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation?

Paid Family and Sick Leave

Workers should not be forced to choose between their economic security and their health, or the health of a loved one. But without paid family and sick leave, workers may not be able to stay home from work when they are sick or someone in their family needs care. Getting sick can have disastrous consequences for workers of color. More than half of Latinx workers and nearly 4 out of 10 of Black workers, are blocked from earning even a single paid sick day at their jobs. These workers typically are paid less and have access to less wealth than White workers, so getting a paycheck docked or losing a job due to illness can be devastating.

QUESTION: What is your position on requiring employers to provide paid family leave and paid sick leave?

The Right to Organize

The right to join or form a union is fundamental to democracy. Through organizing, collective bargaining, and direct action, unionized workers have improved their working conditions, provided healthcare protections, fought for paid leave, and won childcare provisions. Many labor laws and workers' rights have been eroded or are not enforced. For example, employers, corporations, and CEOs steal \$15 billion a year from workers by paying them less than the minimum wage or not paying them at all. Since 2017, millions of workers have lost \$2.2 billion in foregone overtime wages. Other workers in construction, service industries, and the 'gig' economy 'independent contractors' have been misclassified, bringing down wages even further. Nearly 25 million workers must waive their right to a class action lawsuit or joint arbitration. Millions of more workers, including public sector workers who deal with public safety, do not have a voice over safe working conditions, even during an unprecedented pandemic.

Many of these workers are either not allowed to unionize. Those who attempt to unionize are too often retaliated against, or even terminated from employment. For those who are in unions, the right to strike provides a fundamental counter measure to balancing power in the workplace. Low wage workers, including fast food workers and agricultural workers, depend on support from other workers and the community. These workers cannot afford long strikes.

QUESTIONS:

- What is your position on holding corporations and corporate executives personally accountable for interfering with organizing efforts and violations of other labor laws?
- What is your position on providing a federal guarantee for public sector workers to bargain over wages, benefits, and working conditions, including worker safety? What is your position on banning state laws that prohibit unions from collecting dues from all

workers who benefit from union representation that unions are legally obligated to provide?

- What is your position on the right to strike and other forms of direct action, including intermittent strikes and secondary boycotts?

Transportation

The need for local road repairs and for accessible and affordable public transportation is great. Both people who are unable to drive due to disability or age, and people who are unable to afford a car, rely on public transportation. For all Wisconsin residents, public transportation provides an important connection to jobs, healthcare, other services, and entertainment. But many transit systems are facing potential cuts to service territory or route frequency due to lack of funding. Meanwhile, the state continues to prioritize funding intrastate highway expansion projects over local road repairs and public transportation improvements.

QUESTION: What is your position on funding highway expansion projects vs. local transit such as public transportation, local roads, bikes, and pedestrian infrastructure?

Unemployment Insurance

Almost 90 years ago, Wisconsin created the first system of unemployment benefits in the United States, but we are no longer a national leader. The COVID-19 pandemic and the recession it caused have put huge strains on unemployment insurance (UI) systems across the country and have exposed many serious deficiencies in Wisconsin's program. Wisconsin policymakers need to make broad reforms in our state's UI system. The needed reforms include: replacing the antiquated computer system that runs the program, streamlining the process for receiving benefits, increasing the maximum weekly payment, expanding eligibility for people working in the gig economy, eliminating the one-week waiting period for eligibility, and providing sufficient staffing to administer the program.

QUESTION: What is your position on reforming the Unemployment Insurance Program?