

Gov. Evers Launches Legislative Survey On State's Challenges

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin
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Governor asks legislators on both sides of the aisle to take public positions on special session policies to prevent child care industry collapse, expand paid family leave, educate and train future workers, support high-need sectors statewide.

MADISON — In an unprecedented move, Gov. Tony Evers today [launched a legislative survey](#) of the full Wisconsin State Legislature, asking all 132 legislators to take public positions and answer questions on the merits of the governor's comprehensive plan to address the state's longstanding workforce challenges, including whether legislators support investments to increase access to affordable child care and prevent the child care industry's collapse, expand paid family leave, educate and train future workers, and support high-need workforce sectors statewide.

“Each of Wisconsin’s 132 legislators—including the remaining 130 beyond two Republican legislative leaders—must be accountable to the people who elect them. Wisconsinites in each of Wisconsin’s 132 legislative districts deserve to know whether their legislators support ensuring child care is affordable and accessible for working families, investments to prevent the collapse of our state’s child care industry, and efforts to expand paid family leave, among other critical initiatives in my special session legislation to address our state’s workforce challenges,” wrote Gov. Evers today in a letter to the Wisconsin State Legislature containing a legislative survey for each member of the Legislature.



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“Further, understanding each legislator’s position and perspective is not only a fundamental part of legislative accountability but is also a crucial first step toward being able to find real, meaningful solutions to our state’s urgent challenges. Legislators should be expected to provide their positions on the merits of specific components of my workforce plan, my workforce plan in its entirety, and which plans or policies, if any, they support to meaningfully and comprehensively address our state’s workforce challenges.”

Gov. Evers’ legislative survey comes as the Wisconsin State Legislature is set to meet next week at 12:00 p.m. on Wed., Sept. 20, 2023, to take up LRB-4085/LRB-4086, the comprehensive workforce plan to address the state’s longstanding workforce challenges that Gov. Evers announced last month. After Gov. Evers announced his upcoming special session, Republican Speaker Robin Vos and Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu [immediately dismissed the governor’s plan](#) to address the state’s longstanding workforce challenges, including efforts to prevent the collapse of the state’s child care industry.

According to a [report](#) from The Century Foundation, it is estimated that without the necessary investments to stave off the looming fiscal cliff facing the state’s child care industry, 2,110 child care programs are projected to close, resulting in the loss of over 4,880 child care jobs, leaving more than 87,000 kids in Wisconsin without child care, and potentially causing approximately half a billion dollars in economic impacts between parents leaving the workforce and reduced employer productivity.

Unfortunately, the state is already seeing the consequences of a lack of investment in this industry through multiple child care closures, throwing working families and their kids into uncertainty and destabilizing the workforce in local communities. For example, recent reporting from [Wisconsin Watch](#) and the [Grant County Herald Independent](#) have highlighted the concerning child care landscape in Lancaster, a town in Southwestern Wisconsin, which lost its second-largest child care provider, Giggles & Wiggles Daycare, at the end of August. Due to the lack of funding and workforce shortages, they were not able to provide continued care to the 35 enrolled children, resulting in the decision to close their doors. Gov. Evers visited Giggles & Wiggles on August 10, where he met with the owner and the staff who would soon lose their jobs, as well as some of the parents who are now scrambling to find other child care options in a community where there is already a lack of affordable providers. The governor also visited with the owners of Cradles to Crayons Cashton on August 22 at a roundtable discussion with employers at Organic Valley. Cradles to Crayons Cashton was the sole licensed child care provider in Cashton and was licensed to provide care to 50 kids until it [closed its doors on August 25](#).

“As many of you have both publicly and privately acknowledged, our state has long experienced a shrinking labor pool due to several long-term factors that, coupled with our state’s current historically low unemployment and high workforce participation, are causing Wisconsin’s small businesses, farmers and producers, hospitals and healthcare

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sectors, and schools, among other critical employers and industries, to face significant challenges filling available jobs,” Gov. Evers wrote. “Yet, to date, few members of the Legislature have taken any public position on the merits of my special session legislation to comprehensively address our state’s workforce challenges and prevent a looming child care crisis, either in whole or in part.”

“Unfortunately, this situation is neither new nor unique,” Gov. Evers continued. “For years, I have called the Wisconsin State Legislature into special session to address pressing state challenges. These efforts have ranged from providing middle-class tax relief and support to working families facing rising costs due to inflation, investing in our kids and our schools, expanding BadgerCare, supporting our farmers and agricultural industries, and addressing gun violence, among other timely issues, only to have Republican leaders gavel out without any individual members having to publicly express their personal position on the legislation before them or facing accountability for inaction. Doing so has enabled individual legislators in the Wisconsin State Legislature to avoid questions, accountability, and scrutiny regarding their position on issues of statewide consequence.”

Republican legislative leaders have repeatedly ‘gaveled in and out’ of several previous special sessions called by Gov. Evers in seconds without any discussion, deliberation, or debate, often without any other individual, rank-and-file legislators and few, if any, members of the media in attendance. Doing so effectively enables members of the Legislature to avoid answering questions publicly about whether they agree or disagree with their leaders’ decisions and whether they support, oppose, or have any position on issues and policy solutions at the center of the governor’s special session calls, which are often focused on major issues of statewide importance.

The governor’s survey comes as litigation efforts announced in recent weeks are [reportedly aiming to draw new legislative districts for the next upcoming election](#), which could seek to require the full Legislature to run to retain their seats next year.

“Moreover, this accountability is uniquely timely and important. As public press reports indicate there is a possibility the full Wisconsin State Legislature could necessarily face re-election next year, all 132 members of the Legislature should be expected to take a public position and stance on policies and solutions to address our state’s most pressing challenges, and that includes efforts to prevent our child care industry’s collapse, expanding paid family leave, investing in higher education, and targeted investments in high-need areas of our workforce,” Gov. Evers concluded.

The governor’s comprehensive workforce plan includes:

- Providing more than \$340 million, including \$38.9 million in Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) funds, for the Child Care Counts Program that to date has helped more than 4,400 child care providers keep their doors open, ensuring the employment of 22,000 child care professionals and allowing providers to continue to provide high-quality care to more than

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113,000 kids;

- Investing \$22.3 million for the Partner Up! Program, which has helped support employers in purchasing child care spots for their employees at existing regulated child care providers across the state. A portion of this investment redirects the \$15 million that the 2023-25 budget placed in the Joint Finance Committee supplemental appropriation for the purposes of grants to child care providers;

- Creating a first-of-its-kind Wisconsin Paid Family and Medical Leave Act Program to ensure workers are eligible for 12 weeks of paid leave beginning Jan. 1, 2025;

- Expanding eligibility for workers to use family and medical leave, paid or not, to include deployment of a spouse or child and an unforeseen or unexpected closure of a school or child care facility, among other modifications;

- Bolstering higher education and workforce training statewide by investing more than \$320 million in the University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Technical College Systems, including \$17.3 million over the biennium for the Wisconsin Grants program, which provides college students with need-based financial aid;

- Directing \$100 million to continue the successful Workforce Innovation Grant Program to provide grants to regional organizations to design and implement plans to address their region's healthcare-related workforce challenges; and

- Targeting \$75 million to help strengthen high-need areas of our state's workforce, especially in the healthcare and education sectors, to support healthcare workers and Wisconsin's educator pipeline.

In an effort to maximize ease, efficiency, and participation, Gov. Evers' legislative survey contains several 'yes or no' questions such as:

- Do you agree that one of the greatest issues facing Wisconsin is our state's ability to find, recruit, and retain workers to join our workforce?

- Do you agree that losing hundreds or even thousands of Wisconsin's child care providers and slots statewide will force workers to leave our state's workforce?

- Do you support creating a 12-week paid family leave policy in Wisconsin that allows smaller employers with fewer than 50 employees the ability to opt in?

- Do you agree that higher education, including the University of Wisconsin System and Wisconsin Technical College System institutions, are critical to educating, training, retaining, and recruiting Wisconsin's workforce?

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Additionally, Gov. Evers' legislative survey also asks legislators to:

- Indicate whether or not they would vote yes on the governor's workforce special session legislation if a vote were held today;
- Provide details as to which specific provisions of the governor's workforce special session legislation they do or do not support; and
- Specify what changes, modifications, or amendments that could be made to the governor's workforce special session legislation to garner their support.

The governor requested answers to his legislative survey from all 132 members of the Wisconsin State Legislature by 5:00 p.m. on Thurs., Sept. 14, 2023.

More details on the governor's special session legislation to comprehensively address the state's generational workforce challenges, including efforts to prevent the state's child care industry from collapsing, are available [here](#).