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## **Poverty Report Card: Wisconsin Shows Promise, But Still Underachieving Two Years into Campaign, Vision 2020 Evaluates State Efforts**

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP), and the Wisconsin Head Start Association today released the second edition of their *Vision 2020 Report Card*. The report card examines four main areas of child and family well-being, providing a brief analysis of where Wisconsin stands and offering recommendations on how the state can move toward an “A” grade. The areas in which the state received grades are: (1) access to family supporting wages; (2) safe and affordable housing; (3) healthy children; and (4) early care and education. The report card is part of the organizations’ Vision 2020 campaign to end child poverty in Wisconsin by the year 2020. The first edition of the report card was issued at the launch of the campaign in June of 2007.

The release of the *Vision 2020 Report Card* coincides with the statewide Building Bridges to Family Economic Success conference taking place May 4 and 5. This summit on poverty and economic opportunity, convened by Gov. Doyle and the Wisconsin Department of Child and Families with support from the National Governor's Association, focuses on some of the same key issues as the Vision 2020 campaign.

Report card grades remained unchanged since the previous edition, with one exception. The state’s Healthy Children grade improved from B- to B, largely on the strength of the 2008 initiation of the BadgerCare Plus program, which has extended health care coverage to thousands of kids who were previously uninsured or underinsured. Report card highlights include:

**Access to Family-Supporting Wages (C+)**—The economy has made it particularly difficult to achieve progress in this area. Unemployment is up, and wages have been stagnating. Wisconsin could improve its grade by indexing the minimum wage to inflation and providing sufficient financial aid for parents seeking to enhance their skills and credentials in order to obtain better-paying jobs.

**Safe and Affordable Housing (C)**—Wisconsin has not escaped the nationwide housing crisis, and foreclosures are up around the state. Federal economic stimulus legislation is bringing much-needed resources into the state to address our affordable housing problems, but much more must be done to create and preserve housing affordable to families with modest incomes.

**Health Children (B)**—The start of BadgerCare Plus in early 2008 has brought Wisconsin closer to the ultimate goal of making health insurance available to all children in the state. But in many parts of the state, that does not translate into access to health care services due to a shortage of providers. Wisconsin also continues to struggle with severe racial disparities in health outcomes.

**Early Care and Education (B-)**—Wisconsin has a strong record on providing families with access to child care services. However, the quality of that care is not consistently high. By developing systems to evaluate and improve the quality of early care and education programming, we can ensure that Wisconsin’s kids get the kind of great start that will maximize their chances of succeeding in life.

“Vision 2020 is an ambitious but practical approach to ending child poverty. Our aim has been to provide a way for public officials, citizens and organizations to get involved in a tangible effort to tackle poverty in Wisconsin,” said Charity Eleson, executive director of WCCF. “The new report card shows that we’ve made progress in some areas, but much work remains to be done.”

“Research shows that poverty creates major obstacles to kids’ health, school performance and future economic success,” said Richard Schlimm, WISCAP executive director. “The current economic crisis has made these obstacles even more difficult for families to overcome. Wisconsin must do more to explore and implement the kinds of systemic solutions likely to improve outcomes for kids. With the right priorities, we can get better grades than this.”

“Wisconsin has so much to offer, but not all children share equally in those opportunities,” said Shelley Cousin, executive director of the Wisconsin Head Start Association. “By addressing child poverty at its roots and making the right policy decisions, we can give every kid in the state the best possible start in life. They deserve nothing less.”

Since its launch in 2007, 72 organizations and over 1,100 individuals have signed on to the Vision 2020 campaign. Campaign goals include raising public awareness of the impact of poverty on children, spurring discussions aimed at developing solutions to the root causes of poverty, and encouraging policymakers to make elimination of child poverty a top priority.

The Vision 2020 Report Card is available online via the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families website at [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org) and the Vision 2020 website at [www.2020wi.org](http://www.2020wi.org).

Vision 2020 campaign has supporters and allies across the state. To get in touch with somebody in your community involved with Vision 2020, please contact Bob Jacobson at (608) 284-0580, ext. 303.