



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

April 1, 2020

DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY

Speaker Robin Vos
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Majority Leader Fitzgerald and Speaker Vos,

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every corner of our state. In response to this ongoing public health and economic crisis, it is imperative that our state government act with urgency to enact policies that will help Wisconsin families and businesses as quickly as possible.

We appreciate that your offices have been in ongoing communications with our leadership and the Evers administration in an attempt to reach a consensus on the best path forward. The Governor has proposed a robust legislative package that meets many of the challenges our state is facing. While we expect there will be different ideas on some of the details of proposed legislation, it is our hope that a final package will aim to accomplish the same goals and be something that can garner broad bipartisan support.

We all recognize that now is not the time for partisan politics. The people of Wisconsin want to see their state elected officials working together to do everything possible to manage this public health crisis and provide the support for those whose lives have been negatively impacted by this crisis.

Today, we are asking you to call the legislature into session immediately to address the COVID-19 crisis in a swift, bipartisan manner.

Below we have included a list of legislative ideas and proposals aimed at addressing challenges that should have broad, bipartisan consensus, as they affect families and businesses in districts across Wisconsin. As we continue to hear from people throughout the state, we know that other issues will need to be addressed. Each day brings new challenges as we combat COVID-19. We look forward to the legislature considering these ideas, as well. At a minimum, we must address the most pressing needs of our state during this unprecedented moment.

Public Health & Health Care

Increased funding and staffing for DHS and local public health departments

DHS and local public health departments require funding for increased staffing and resources to rigorously track and contain COVID-19 cases, both now and once we are past the social distancing phase of this public health event. In addition, we hope you will consider the changes proposed by Governor Evers to remove the barriers to adding necessary staff by allowing the state to rehire annuitants to critical state positions; and speeding up or expand licensing for health care workers and other vital positions.

Ensure that everyone has access to quality health care

The state must assure people that they will be able to receive the care they deserve during this pandemic without direct and indirect barriers and excessive health insurance costs.

We support the proposals put forth by Governor Evers that prohibit the following:

- Coverage discrimination based on COVID-19;
- Cancellation of insurance policies during COVID-19
- Cost-sharing and prior authorization for testing, diagnosis, treatment, prescriptions, and vaccines related to COVID-19
- Surprise and balance billing for care related to COVID-19 and out-of-network care that is a result of a preferred provider being unavailable due to public health emergency
- Insurers from requiring prior authorization or imposing quantity limit on certain prescription drugs during a public health emergency

In addition, we must require insurers to cover all telehealth services that would be covered were the services provided in-person. This item has bipartisan support, with some GOP members voicing approval and introducing legislation to do something similar to what the Governor proposed. Lastly, it is crucial that we mandate coverage for testing, diagnosis, treatment, prescriptions and vaccines related to COVID-19.

Save state taxpayer dollars by maximizing federal resources

We must make the needed changes to state law to ensure that the state may obtain an increased federal match for state Medicaid programs, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in savings for state taxpayers.

Unemployment Insurance

Suspend the one-week waiting period for Unemployment Insurance (UI)

Retroactive to the day of the declared crisis, suspend the one-week waiting period for Unemployment Insurance (UI) to help families who have been impacted by unexpected job losses and as our economy recovers for a period of one year.

Expand UI to cover workers without access to paid leave

Ensure in state law that workers who do not have access to paid sick leave and are told to isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19, even if not diagnosed, are considered unemployed and are able to access UI when in quarantine ordered by a medical professional or public health official.

Expand Wisconsin Work-Share statute

Waive the current limits and provide employers with the flexibility to reduce hours to allow for more workers to stay employed while allowing employees to use UI to make up for a portion of lost hours. And make it easy for employers to participate by simply filing the paperwork. This has the benefit of easing the strain on the state UI program while also helping more people stay employed.

Housing

Protect business and single-family renters from eviction

Ensure that workers and businesses impacted by unexpected job losses and lost revenue are not evicted during the public health emergency, providing housing security for families and protecting public health. It is crucial that people and small businesses impacted by the crisis do not face eviction due to forces beyond their control.

K12 Education

Grant additional waiver authority for DPI

During the public health emergency, allow DPI to waive requirements in statute or administrative rules applying to school boards, school districts, private schools, or independent charter schools. This allows districts and the department flexibility on mandated state testing or school milk requirements that all of us have heard concerns about.

Ensuring teacher and school employee pay

Require school boards to continue to pay and provide benefits for teachers and other employees during the public health emergency, at their regular rates and hours.

Supporting Small Businesses

Expand access to low-interest, long-term loans and grants for small businesses

Provide state grants and low-interest, long-term loans to small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the recently passed federal package will provide considerable assistance, we should look for opportunities to keep businesses afloat and incentivize assistance loans made to small business for retention of workers. This would help to avoid mass layoffs and keep workers employed. Once people are lost into the sidelines, it takes a long time to get them back into the workforce.

Defer sales tax payments for small businesses

Allow the deferment of sales taxes without interest or penalty during the public health emergency for small businesses, allowing for more cash flow to help main street businesses.

Give local government and small businesses flexibility in meeting state deadlines

Businesses throughout our state are struggling as we respond to COVID-19. We should be providing flexibility to people, businesses, and local governments in Wisconsin to pay taxes and meet deadlines in a way that allows them to keep their businesses open and people employed.

Elections

While there is little time to act to address the massive problems facing the immediate April 7 election, it is important that we take all steps possible to protect both the public and the democratic process for the 7th Congressional District special election on May 12, the primary election on August 11, and the general election on November 3.

The following changes should be made immediately:

Allow absentee ballots postmarked by the day of the election to be counted

Ensure that voters are able to have their vote counted, regardless of slow delivery due to historic absentee ballot requests.

Waive the witness signature requirement during the public health emergency

Allow voters self-isolating or self-quarantining alone to access their right to vote. Additionally, the legislature should also consider broader changes to improve elections following the spring election.

Prepare to vote-by-mail in 2020

While preparations were not put in place for the April 7th election, we must prepare now for future elections. Moving later 2020 elections to vote-by-mail now is the prudent strategy to protect our elections and our public health at the same time. At a minimum, mailing absentee ballots to every registered voter should be considered.

Modify voter registration deadlines

Ensure the online registration system allows registration through five days before the election date, to accommodate voters who are unable to leave their homes and clerks that are reducing in-person registration.

Modify nomination paper requirements for candidates

Change the requirements for nomination papers during a public health emergency to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus. The traditional signature process encourages behavior that violates the public health guidelines promoted to slow the spread of COVID-19. Ideas could include cutting the number of required signatures in half for each office or allowing nomination papers to be circulated for electronic signatures. Whether there is a change or not, it might also be responsible to consider extending the deadline to June 15.

Legislature

Allow legislators to communicate with constituents during a public health emergency

Specify that the legislative 50 piece rule not apply to communications with constituents about a public health emergency while it is in place. While there are many ways for the public to get information about a public health information, it is important that accurate and timely information be shared with people across the state about a public health emergency, the actions taken to address the emergency, and resources people need to navigate it.

These are some of the priorities we believe should be acted upon immediately. If there is not support for the specific ideas proposed above, we strongly encourage you to offer alternative ideas that address the challenges outlined. The COVID-19 pandemic has already had devastating consequences on our state that will only get worse in the near future. We owe it to the people of Wisconsin to act with urgency and act together, united as legislators with our Governor. We are asking you to not delay another day in convening the legislature and getting to work to help the people of our state.

We hope you'll take this letter in the spirit of bipartisanship Wisconsin needs at this moment in our state's history.

Sincerely,

Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz

Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling

Representative Dianne Hesselbein

Representative Mark Spreitzer

Senator Fred Risser

Representative Steve Doyle

Representative Evan Goyke

Senator Dave Hansen

Representative Amanda Stuck

Representative Melissa Sargent

Senator Tim Carpenter

Representative David Crowley

Representative Jimmy Anderson

Senator Patty Schachtner

Representative Debra Kolste

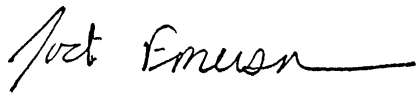
Representative Jonathan Brostoff

Senator Chris Larson

Representative Daniel Riemer

Representative Lakeshia Myers

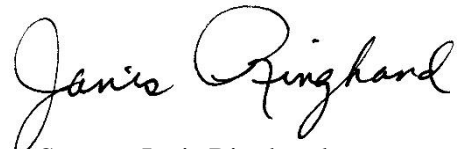
Senator Lena Taylor



Representative Jodi Emerson



Representative Don Vruwink



Senator Janis Ringhand



Representative Katrina Shankland



Representative Gary Hebl



Representative Lisa Subeck



Representative Greta Neubauer



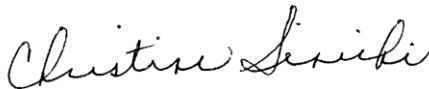
Representative Tod Ohnstad



Representative Sondy Pope



Representative Kalan Haywood



Representative Christine Sinicki



Representative Robyn Vining



Representative Jill Billings



Representative Jason Fields



Representative Beth Meyers



Representative David Bowen



Representative Dave Considine



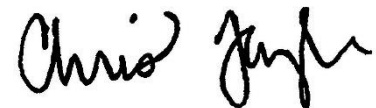
Representative Tip McGuire



Representative Shelia Stubbs



Representative Marisabel Cabrera



Representative Chris Taylor



Representative Nick Milroy

Representative JoCasta Zamarripa

Senator Mark Miller

Senator Jeff Smith

Senator LaTonya Johnson

Senator Jon Erpenbach

Senator Robert Wirch