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Contact: David Callender, 608.210.6706
david.callender@wedc.org

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**WEDC report assesses ongoing economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic,
outlines recovery priorities**
Report mandated as part of statewide COVID-19 bill

MADISON, June 30, 2020 – A report from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) assesses the complex ongoing economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Wisconsin and identifies priorities for the state’s recovery efforts.

The 150-page report, “[Wisconsin Tomorrow – An Economy for All](#),” was submitted to lawmakers and Governor Tony Evers on Tuesday. The state’s COVID-19 relief legislation, 2019 Act 185, directed WEDC to submit a plan by June 30 “for providing support to the major industries in this state that have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency, including tourism, manufacturing, agriculture, forest products, construction, retail and services.”

WEDC and other state agencies worked with stakeholders around the state in business, education and local government in writing the report. Many stakeholders advised that assessments of the economic consequences of the pandemic continue to evolve—as must any plans for a full economic recovery. The identified industries, along with the people of Wisconsin, are still in the midst of the crisis and have not yet fully formed their plans for recovering.

Central to the report are first-person comments from Wisconsinites from all walks of life to provide “real world” context about their experiences with COVID-19 and the challenges they continue to face. Small businesses stand alongside iconic Wisconsin companies in sharing their perspectives.

WEDC offers the following observations:

- Tourism, retail and service businesses are still closed, are open in voluntary limited capacity or are struggling for customers. Most have seen substantial declines in their business and are unsure of their long-term prospects.
- Agriculture and food and beverage, which have been identified as essential businesses, are seeking to anticipate the markets and manage disruptions to the supply chain.
- Manufacturing and construction saw less immediate disruption but anticipate the long-term economic impact with slower consumer spending and overall activity as well as declining capital investment.

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- Forest products have had perhaps the starkest divide, with consumer paper goods at record highs while the decline in printed advertising has seriously impacted the catalog and magazine industry.
- Education and health care—both huge economic engines in their own right—have also been disrupted or nearly brought to a halt by the pandemic.

The report highlights how the state and local governments have responded to the crisis already by disbursing more than \$13.7 billion in federal funds, which includes support for small businesses through the Payroll Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans.

Also included in that total is more than \$1.85 billion in funding through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which has supported public health efforts, hospitals, schools and farmers. But the report warns the long-term consequences of the pandemic will continue to affect the state's fiscal resources, which will require additional federal aid.

In light of the evolving nature of the pandemic and its still-unfolding impact on the state's economy, the report calls for the state to focus on three priorities:

- **Get Everyone Back to Work:** The report notes that COVID-19 has transformed Wisconsin's workforce. Many service-sector jobs, particularly in retail and restaurants, have been eliminated and are not likely to return. It will be crucial to reskill and train people who lost their jobs. The pandemic has reinforced access to high-quality childcare, early childhood education and health care as essential to the economy.
- **Fix Broadband:** The pandemic has highlighted the digital divide in our state. Education, e-commerce, remote working and even contact with government depend on access to computers and high-speed internet.
- **Support Innovation:** Innovation fuels job growth, as well as flexibility and resiliency in our businesses. In a time of constrained resources and risk aversion, Wisconsin has the chance to use its innovative, entrepreneurial spirit to launch its recovery.

WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes also calls out "another equally important, but more longstanding, crisis that will determine our state's economic future: the crisis of racial disparity and inequity. As the state's leader in economic development, we know by advancing the economic well-being of every Wisconsinite, we can make a difference."

Recognizing the challenges looming for every region and industry in the state and the need for collaboration and cooperation in finding solutions, the report calls for a "spirited yet productive debate, one that reflects Wisconsin's history of big ideas and ground-breaking innovation and lays the groundwork for Wisconsin's strongest economy."

The report can be found online at: wedc.org/wisconsin-tomorrow

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About the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) leads economic development efforts for the state by advancing and maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, communities and people to thrive in a globally competitive environment. Working with more than

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600 regional and local partners, WEDC develops and delivers solutions representative of a highly responsive and coordinated economic development network. Visit wedc.org or follow WEDC on Twitter @WEDCNews to learn more.

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