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*The Gamaliel Foundation in Wisconsin*

## Statement on the Proposed 2011-13 State Budget

Every budget is a statement of values, especially budgets that are made in hard times.

Wisconsin, like most states, faces very difficult budget decisions. These times call for a spirit of shared sacrifice. We believe this means that everyone in our state, including the wealthy and corporations must make some sacrifices for the common good. It is contrary to our values to call on public sector workers and the poor to carry the entire burden of balancing the budget. Like most people in Wisconsin, we believe a just and balanced budget can only be achieved if we are willing to look at revenue options to minimize harmful program cuts.

We recognize that people of good will can come to different conclusions regarding the potential means of balancing the state's budget. We believe, however that there are serious principles and values involved in this debate. After consideration and reflection, WISDOM, as an organization, calls on our Governor and Legislature to:

- 1. Consider Revenue Options:** Reducing taxes cannot be the sole, guiding principle in crafting a state budget. Tax cuts must be weighed against the need to maintain our public structures and to protect the most vulnerable people in our midst. There are many ways to bring in more revenue, locally and on a state level, without damaging our economy and it is irresponsible to refuse to consider them or weigh them against other needs. Our state is not "broke." We have more than enough capacity to support our public services and to provide adequate assistance to those in need if all are called upon to do their share.
- 2. Restore Funding for Medicaid:** The proposed \$500 million reduction in medical assistance for programs like Badger Care and Senior Care that serve low-income people is wrong. It is wrong to permit thousands of low- and moderate-income Wisconsinites to lose their health insurance. We object to changing the rules for healthcare administration so that the Administration has total authority over who receives care and how much they pay, thereby stripping Wisconsin citizens of our right to hold our legislators accountable for changes in the Medicaid laws. The funding for healthcare must be replaced and the decision-making process over access must remain a transparent, legislative system.
- 3. Restore Funding for Transit:** There are two huge reductions in Transit funding: a) drastically lower state support and b) the loss of federal funds that are contingent on collective bargaining rights. These cuts will devastate our communities, especially low-wage workers, people with disabilities, the poor and the elderly. Unemployed people without cars will lose their only means to reach potential workplaces, and many currently employed people will be unable to get to work. These proposed cuts to public transit are accompanied by a massive increase in money allocated for building new highways. Transit

spending can be restored simply by keeping the road-building budget at current levels, replacing the added highway funds in the Transportation budget for Transit, and by restoring Transit Workers rights to collective bargaining.

- 4. Restore Immigrant Rights:** The repeal of “in-state tuition” for immigrant students does nothing to balance the budget; but it makes life more difficult for young people who were brought to this country at a young age and seek to fulfill the American dream through education.
- 5. Restore Support for Low-wage Workers and the Poor.** This budget is punitive towards lower income families. There are cuts in income support for the poor and unemployed. Food and nutrition assistance are reduced. Medical services, child care and in-home care for seniors and persons with disabilities are more expensive and less accessible. Taxes for low-income households will be substantially higher. These cuts do very little to balance the budget, yet they create great hardship for families already struggling to recover from the worst recession since 1929.
- 6. Restore Collective Bargaining Rights to Public-Sector Workers:** The attack on unions has done great damage to our state. We take particular offense at the attempt to demonize state and local employees who maintain hundreds of vital community functions. Unions have helped to build and maintain a strong middle class. As Milwaukee’s Catholic Archbishop ListECKI has said, “hard times do not nullify the moral obligation each of us has to respect the legitimate rights of workers.”
- 7. Maintain Strong Communities and Public Structures:** The budget process must not undermine the operations of schools, cities and counties vital for middle-class families, individuals and businesses to prosper. It is crucial to analyze the impact of cuts in state funding for education, municipal services and county programs, and to make these very clear before voting begins, and before stripping local communities of the capacity to decide whether or not to replace the lost revenue with local measure. The impact of the projected damage should lead us to develop more constructive policy options.
- 8. Maintain an Open, Participatory Budget Process:** Wisconsin has a long, proud history of participatory democracy. Every budget cycle includes many hearings, including at least 5 outside of Madison, where citizens all have the right to share their concerns with their legislators. Openness to citizen input is essential for our democracy. It is more important than ever in this year when such drastic changes are being proposed.

These are just some of the many, many concerns WISDOM has regarding the budget. We believe the whole proposed budget must be fundamentally reconstructed so we might arrive at a state budget that maintains the strength of our communities protects the rights of workers and honors our obligation to care for those who are most vulnerable in our midst.

*WISDOM is a network of congregation-based organizations throughout the state. Currently, WISDOM includes 145 congregations of 17 religious denominations. WISDOM has local organizations in Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Waukesha County, the Fox Valley, Green Bay, Eau Claire, La Crosse and Wausau. Organizations are forming in Manitowoc, Madison and the small towns and rural areas of southwestern Wisconsin.*