League of Women Voters of Dane County Statement
Regarding Board of Estimates Report to the City of Madison Common Council
-------November 6, 2007-------

The League of Women Voters of Dane County is pleased that the Mayor and the Board of Estimates of the City of Madison have recognized the value of investing in high quality early childhood care and education. As research has clearly demonstrated, early childhood care and education of high quality is one of the few interventions that actually decreases crime and use of social services, while increasing educational attainment and earnings.

The Community Services child care accreditation program and Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) play a critical role in improving the quality of child care centers serving Madison’s children. The League is pleased that funding has been restored for the 4-C Latino Project and for city accreditation staff and grants. We know you recognize that in the long run, the best thing we can do for community safety is to ensure that our children grow up to be productive, law-abiding community citizens.

Another critical support for children is the availability of safe, standard affordable housing. One way to achieve this is by allowing persons access to affordable housing throughout the city without fear of discrimination. Again the Board of Estimates has recognized such a need by restoring funding to the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison.

However, the $3 million removed from the Madison Affordable Housing Trust Fund was not restored. The League considers the Trust an important tool in the effort to decrease the number of families now living in low income pockets by increasing the availability of affordable housing throughout the city. Such a distribution of families of low income enriches all of us. As stated in Ordinance, 4.22, creating the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, “Projects funded by the Trust Fund shall be disbursed throughout the City so no single neighborhood experiences a disproportionate concentration of housing units for Low Income and Very Low Income households.” This disbursement cannot be done, however, when the Trust Fund is gutted and the monies transferred to only one affordable housing development.

The League recognizes the importance of the Allied Drive development, but equally recognizes the value of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. According to the Funds Status Report #7: September 5, 2007, there was $3.9 million of city funds in the Trust. Now, with the withdrawal of $3 million, only $.9 million remains. We are dismayed that not only were funds removed, but no additional funding is provided for in the budget. The League, furthermore, wonders how the drawing down of funds by such a significant amount will affect the city’s ability to receive additional funds from state or federal programs.
The same report states, “The twenty-six months of Housing Trust Fund operations show a City commitment to fund seven projects which would not been otherwise able to secure the kind of flexible financing offered by the Trust Fund.” Two were canceled by the approved recipient developers and four are now completed: locations identified as Mifflin Street, Troy Gardens, Northlawn, Twin Oaks, and Madison’s east side. According to the report this translates into 57 units and one home. How can the accomplishments of the past twenty-six months be surpassed or at least equaled in 2008 with seriously reduced funding?

The ordinance, after all, states “The Trust Fund shall be a permanent endowment and continually renewable source of revenue to meet, in part, the housing needs of the Low Income and Very Low Income households of the City.” It is the League’s opinion that the removal of $3 million from the Fund destroys the intent of the ordinance. We ask Common Council members, therefore, to restore the $3 million and allow the Trust Fund to continue to help the private sector provide affordable housing throughout the Madison community. Finally, it is important to remember that the City Housing Committee and the original Trust Fund committee recommended building the Housing Trust Fund to a level of $10 million.

The League has one comment on this year’s City of Madison budget process. We registered our support of and opposition to a few of the budget amendments considered by the Board of Estimates, but we did not ask to speak. We were surprised that non-speaking registrations for and against amendments were not brought to the attention of the Board prior to the deliberations as is usually done at hearings. In order for alderpersons to make informed decisions it is necessary they hear the opinions of both speaking and non-speaking registrants.