July 14, 2017

Re: Wisconsin BadgerCare Reform

Dear Administrator:

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has adopted the following as part of its position regarding health care in Wisconsin:

State government should develop ways to provide coverage for uninsured residents. Any state program of health insurance should be designed to meet the needs of a broad segment of residents, including individuals who are unable to purchase health insurance at a reasonable percentage of family income.

The League of Women Voters of Dane County strongly opposes the Wisconsin Department of Health Service’s request for a waiver of certain Medicaid requirements for the BadgerCare program. Although the state’s proposal has many serious flaws, I address only three areas: the imposition of premiums and copays, the limitation on the period of coverage, and the addition of a work requirement.

Perhaps the most egregious aspect of this waiver request is the imposition of monthly premiums and copays on Wisconsinites whose income is already insufficient and may even be below the poverty level (the fees apply to individuals earning as little as $513/month!). No matter how nominal, BadgerCare premiums will be a barrier to individuals who struggle to pay for food and shelter. Furthermore, even the mechanics of making a regular payment can be overwhelming to an individual already burdened by poverty (to say nothing of the substantial new costs to the state of collecting and tracking small amounts of money, withdrawing and restoring coverage, and correcting the inevitable errors). The requirements will certainly deter participation in BadgerCare, with the result that urgent healthcare needs will be treated in emergency rooms. This will only escalate overall healthcare costs, while also depriving these Wisconsinites of the very sort of regular care that would keep them healthy enough to be productive workers and community members. It is difficult to understand what positive benefit these proposed changes are intended to accomplish.

The waiver request to impose time limits on BadgerCare coverage and work requirements for eligibility ignores the very reasons many people find themselves qualifying for BadgerCare. Many suffer from chronic health conditions that prevent
them from maintaining stable employment. Their conditions can improve with regular management and care, but are devastating when only treated in the emergency room in a crisis. Diabetes, heart disease, immune system diseases, and mental health issues like manic-depressive disorder and depression are not time-limited. Many Wisconsinites who qualify for BadgerCare are working now, but can only find part-time, low-wage jobs. Some are students, improving their prospects for future employment. Still others are caring for a family member. Denying these Wisconsinites health care benefits makes them even more vulnerable and more likely to end up consuming public benefits, rather than working and becoming self-supporting. This is not good for Wisconsin taxpayers.

Thank you for considering the Dane County League’s perspective on Wisconsin’s BadgerCare waiver application.

Sincerely,

Brook Chase Soltvedt
President, League of Women Voters of Dane County, Wisconsin