



Jewish Community  
Relations Council  
**MILWAUKEE**  
JEWISH FEDERATION



WISCONSIN  
**FAITH**  
VOICES  
FOR JUSTICE

Wisconsin  
Jewish  
Conference



## For Immediate Release

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Madison – Last Thursday, a diverse group of nine religious organizations sent a letter to members of the Wisconsin Legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance, criticizing the governor’s controversial proposals to drug test applicants for some public assistance programs and asking that the proposals be removed from the budget.

“We do so because of our shared commitment to respect, compassion, and fairness for all persons,” the groups say. “In our respective religious traditions poverty and joblessness are not indicators of bad character.”

“Drug addiction is not simply a matter of moral weakness. It is rather a chronic illness that requires ongoing support and treatment.” the letter states.

The groups acknowledge that “The stated intent of these provisions is to see that people get treatment if they need it, and to ensure that they are employable.” However, they say, “We see many reasons to doubt” that the drug testing proposals will help realize those goals.

The letter identifies a number of questions and concerns about the proposals, which would affect applicants for BadgerCare Plus, FoodShare Employment and Training, some W-2 work programs, and Unemployment Insurance.

Among the concerns raised are questions of fairness, stigma, impact on children and communities, cost-effectiveness, and the availability of treatment programs for low-income persons who are identified as having substance abuse problems.

Because of the problems with the policy, the group argues “It is likely . . . that many persons who are jobless or in poverty would be simply punished, rather than helped.”

The letter concludes, “We agree that policies should help the needy without enabling dependency of those able to support themselves. But we should also avoid policies that require us to abandon those among us who

cannot help themselves, or who need a little more time, patience and assistance to be able to support themselves and their families.”

Groups signing the letter were: Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee; Community Relations Council, Milwaukee; Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin; Madison-area Urban Ministry; Wisconsin Catholic Conference; Wisconsin Council of Churches; Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice; Wisconsin Jewish Conference; and WISDOM.