



DANE COUNTY

Joe Parisi
County Executive

February 18, 2015

Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary of Health & Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are writing to call your attention to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's proposal to direct Wisconsin's Department of Health Services to seek a federal waiver to implement expensive and ineffective drug screening and testing as an additional condition of eligibility for those seeking federal SNAP Foodshare/Medical Assistance.

We have deep concerns about the impact drug testing will have on people across Wisconsin, especially those in Dane County, who fall on hard times. While Dane County has long maintained the lowest unemployment rate in the state, the effects of poverty are visible throughout our county and state, posing some of the greatest challenges facing our communities.

People who fall on hard times deserve to be treated with dignity - not presumed criminals.

Governor Walker's request would create new unprecedented barriers to an individual's right to federal aid and potentially limit economic opportunities.

In Dane County alone, this would subject thousands of men and women annually to unnecessary and costly testing at an expense potentially greater than \$2 million. Statewide, this expense will be much greater - potentially exceeding \$10 million. That is millions in federal resources that could be more prudently spent to help low-to-middle income families get back on their feet and access opportunity.

Other states have tried implementing drug testing programs with disastrous results, costing taxpayers and denying eligible individuals much needed aid benefits. According to the Hunger Task Force, in 2011 under Governor Rick Scott, Florida passed a similar drug testing requirement, which courts eventually ruled was unconstitutional. The law required recipients of federal benefits and state workers to pay for the drug test and allowed denial of benefits to anyone who refused testing. From July-September 2011, only 9 failures were recorded, while 565 individuals were denied benefits due to refusal.

Given that these individuals are generally low income workers, denying needed benefits to those who refuse to participate assumes those individuals are drug users when in fact they may simply be unable to afford the test. After Florida spent nearly \$400,000 defending the program in court, it was

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repeatedly deemed unconstitutional. Only 2.6% of recipients in Florida tested positive for narcotics – below the national average – and the program cost more tax dollars to implement than it saved in denying benefits.

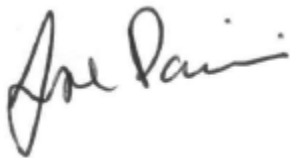
We strongly urge you to review and respond promptly to the language proposed in Governor Walker’s budget. Alerting the Governor that his proposal will not be granted a federal waiver will also provide certainty to SNAP and Medical Assistance applicants and recipients. A preemptive rejection of the Governor’s proposal will also assure the Wisconsin state legislature has the clarity of the federal government’s position prior to final budget adoption.

We remain concerned Governor Walker may choose to implement his proposal regardless of the outcome of the requested federal waivers. Such an unprecedented move would likely result in costly legal action and needless fear and uncertainty for thousands of citizens in Wisconsin.

For the reasons set forth above, it is critical your agencies preemptively reject Governor Walker’s plan to impose new conditions of eligibility on SNAP and Medical Assistance applicants. We have enclosed a copy of the pertinent portions from Governor Walker’s budget proposal, which describes the drug screening and drug testing proposal in greater detail.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joe Parisi
Dane County Executive



Rep. Mark Pocan
Member of Congress WI-02

Enclosure



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Joe Parisi
County Executive

February 18, 2015

Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

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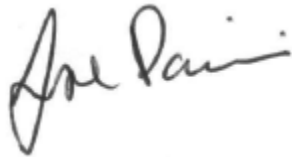
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