



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
MARINA DIMITRIJEVIC

COUNTY BOARD CHAIRWOMAN

Testimony

Before the Joint Committee on Finance

April 4, 2013

Marina Dimitrijevic

Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board

Welcome to Milwaukee County. I thank the Co-Chairs and members of the Committee for ensuring that Milwaukee County residents had a venue for public testimony on the budget. We appreciate having the opportunity to showcase our community and discuss the state budget in the largest county in Wisconsin. Thank you also to the Mayor of Greendale for hosting this public hearing.

My name is Marina Dimitrijevic, and I was elected Chairwoman of the Milwaukee County Board last April. Born and raised in Milwaukee County, I get to see on a daily basis how the diversity of the people, our commerce and our communities benefit the State of Wisconsin. As we all work to improve our economy and recover from challenging times, I know you understand that investing and promoting Milwaukee County is paramount in moving the state forward.

While there is never any shortage of need, there is also no shortage of opportunities in Milwaukee County. With job creation a top priority, we see promise in this state budget. We are excited about investments in our infrastructure, such as the Hoan Bridge and the Zoo Interchange. We all know that these projects not only improve our transportation system, but they also create jobs.

We support and applaud the investment in the VETransfer program, which is starting right here in Milwaukee. This investment supports returning veterans through an entrepreneurial program from promotion of a veteran's idea to small business implementation, so they too can create jobs.

We also see promise in funds for the technical college system and additional funds for worker training. As we all know and have heard, there are businesses that want to hire people, but our retraining programs need additional support to accommodate need.

As we talk about the need for job creation, we have to understand how our transit system is invaluable to improving our economy. You probably have already heard, and you will hear again today, the Milwaukee County Transit System is essential to getting people to work. People in our urban areas also



rely on transit to get to recreational activities and to purchase goods. Last budget, transit took a 10% cut, an approximate loss of \$9 million statewide. Of that amount, \$6.8 million was to Milwaukee County. The proposed budget invests significantly in other portions of our transportation system, and we are supportive of that package and appreciate the additional funds put into local road maintenance. But transit was left behind, and it is unsustainable.

As the new Chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors, I launched a Chat with the Chair series and attempted to travel to or from every municipality in Milwaukee County by bus. The transit system in Milwaukee County delivers millions of rides every year. Still, my ability to connect to every municipality was limited and people on this listening tour repeatedly asked me to extend service into their community. With requests from communities like Franklin and Waukesha County to increase routes, we should be on the verge of expanding service to new businesses and new areas. Unfortunately, without funding to even fill the gap on inflationary costs and no restoration of the previous cut, we will not be able to fill the need businesses and communities are asking for. In fact, with nowhere else to cut, we will have to increase fares (most likely higher than other larger metropolitan communities) and decrease routes. These alternatives are always counterproductive. We are hopeful you will look seriously at restoring the cuts to transit. I ask you for a solution, one that will allow me to tell our constituents that transit services in Milwaukee County will improve, not further decrease. Now more than ever, we need to move forward on transit and help connect people to jobs

There are many other issues important to Milwaukee County such as child support, health care, mental health community services, 911 services, levy limits and, of course, public safety. All of these issues are important to keeping our economy headed in the right direction. Others here today will discuss these important issues, which we care about so deeply. For example, across Wisconsin, counties face significant child support cuts that will affect our ability to serve families who depend on our services. I ask that you give special consideration to finding a solution that will benefit the children and families who rely on us to collect support on their behalf.

I would like to end with support for a very important initiative. Family violence is a significant public health and safety issue. Supports for women and children are available but can be splintered. Children's Hospital of Wisconsin has proposed an amazing and innovative project to centralize and coordinate services for adults, families and children involved with domestic violence, and we are all very supportive of this effort. We are hopeful you will approve this project as you move forward with the budget process.

Thank you again for being in Greendale, in Milwaukee County. I appreciate your time and commitment to public service.