

MARCH 30, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**7 Rivers Alliance and Competitive Wisconsin, Inc.
convene summit on early care and education**

***Statewide meeting examining options for addressing critical workforce shortages by
investing local governmental American Rescue Plan Act funds
in improving access to early care and education programs***

[LA CROSSE] Leaders from the 7 Rivers Alliance and Competitive Wisconsin Inc. (CWI) announced today they are convening a major summit on early child care and education April 14th at Western Technical College. The statewide in-person and virtual summit for local government officials, employers, other community leaders and interested citizens is dedicated to identifying options for strengthening and expanding early care and education programs that would help parents who want to work but lack the childcare options they need to do so.

“We can’t grow our economy, provide the services our citizens need, or build the future we all want without addressing the shortage of workers in Wisconsin,” said Chris Hardie, CEO of the 7 Rivers Alliance economic development region, explaining, “Healthy, vibrant communities are obviously critical to our ability to recruit and retain the workers we need and it has become increasingly apparent we can’t do either without improving our ability to meet younger workers’ need for high quality early childhood care and education.”

Jim Buchheim, Community and Social Impact Officer for American Family Insurance and Chair of CWI, agreed, saying, “Improving the ability of Wisconsin communities to help working parents find the level of care and educational support they want for their pre-school children has both short-term value because it will allow workers who are already in our communities to get to work and long-term value because it will provide a larger, better equipped flow of young workers in the years ahead.”

According to Mark O’Connell, President and CEO of the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) and Vice Chair of CWI, the Summit on Early Childhood Care and Education is one of eight summits CWI is organizing as part of a CWI initiative called Wisconsin Tomorrow dedicated to working with local and regional leaders around the state on specific workforce recruitment and retention enhancement strategies, including early childhood care and education, housing, broadband, health care, transportation, community quality of life and opportunity, energy and rural resurgence.

“The need for these community-strengthening workforce recruitment and retention strategies was apparent last year when elected officials and community leaders came together to discuss how best to invest the more than \$2 billion dedicated to local governments in Wisconsin in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) at a CWI virtual gathering co-hosted by the WCA, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities,

the Wisconsin Towns Association and the UW System,” O’Connell noted, adding, “At that meeting we talked about the need for more expertise and information, identification of investment options for this one-time money that would be sustainable over time and the creation of strategic collaborations dedicated to specific outcomes. The Wisconsin Tomorrow Summits will help us on all of these fronts.”

The 7 Rivers Alliance-Competitive Wisconsin, Inc. Wisconsin Tomorrow Summit on Early Childhood Care and Education is being co-hosted by the UW La Crosse, Western Technical College and the Wisconsin Counties Association. It is being sponsored by CWI and American Family Insurance, with additional support from Gundersen Health System, Dairyland Power and WisBusiness. Registration is available at : <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/competitive-wisconsin-incs-wisconsin-tomorrow-early-care-and-education-tickets-299884411347>

Competitive Wisconsin, Inc. is a unique mission-driven, non-partisan, collaboration established in 1981 by leaders of Wisconsin’s business, labor, agricultural, academic and governmental communities to identify, understand and develop strategic options to address major systemic and structural challenges to the state’s economic and social wellbeing.

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