



# DANE COUNTY

**Joe Parisi**  
County Executive

November 16, 2022

To: Dane County Board of Supervisors

Fr: County Executive Joe Parisi

Re: 2023 Budget Action

Today I signed the 2023 Dane County budget. As a whole, this budget reflects the moment we live in; prioritizing the ability of families to obtain life basics like food and housing at a time when costs are making it harder for all to get by. No community is immune from the impacts of inflation. It has widened income disparities, testing our county's human services safety net. The work we've done will help more families weather the trials of inflation while we remain vigilant for the potential of economic recession as prices come down in the year ahead. The work county government does and services we provide are very dependent on economic condition. Proceeding with prudence is our best path to insulating against any upcoming economic decline. This trend will need to be closely monitored.

The budget I signed today builds upon the county's legacies in the areas of behavioral health services, caring for our most vulnerable, and addressing both the root causes and effects of climate change. It offers an even bolder path forward on the work needed to clean up our lakes. It creates a brand new county department, committed to implementing criminal justice reforms that address disparities, reduce recidivism, and protect public safety.

While I am in agreement with the vast majority of the budget as adopted, for several reasons I am vetoing a provision related to the county's jail consolidation project. I took several things into consideration prior to issuing this veto of lines 128-136.

The county has been talking about closing the antiquated, unsafe jail space in the City County Building (CCB) for more than a decade. After spending millions of dollars on studies, analysis, and design alternatives, there are still hundreds of individuals that remain in that space today – physical confines that clearly do not reflect the values of a progressive criminal justice model focused on treatment, rehabilitation, and a path to a true second chance through meaningful reform. Just a few months ago, the County Board approved designing a compromise solution addressing the outdated CCB jail. The budget presented to me called for stopping the very design work the Board asked be done then and is now only weeks away from completion.

It would be one thing to stop progress if there was consensus on a viable alternative. The budget adopted offers broad policy goals but charts no clear path forward. Absent a substantive alternative that includes County Board agreement on design specifications and funding, I feel stopping the thoughtful, detailed design work the county has invested in would be irresponsible, wasteful, and perpetuate the start/stop cycle that's driven up the cost of this project.

We also need to remember why the County ventured down this path in the first place. The priority from the beginning has been closing the City County Building Jail. As of today, there's only one project being designed that accomplishes that fundamental goal.

The compromise jail consolidation project the Board previously asked be designed reduces over 200 beds from our current jail capacity, while still closing the CCB jail. The county has spent millions on designing and re-designing different iterations of a jail consolidation project. Before we consider stopping work that's close to completion, staff assigned to this project and the design team would need tangible direction. If we are going to make a generational investment we need to shutter once and for all the last generation's answer to what a jail looks like. Having to keep open 70-year-old jail space is neither real progress nor the reform we all stand for. Even the most cutting-edge approaches to reform can't overcome archaic practices like solitary confinement.

It's important we push ourselves to accept there are multiple truths with every issue we work on. The jail consolidation issue is no different. Politics at the state and national levels have devolved into all or nothing, zero sum games. False choices can't drive this conversation. We can have both the most progressive criminal justice system in the country that diverts those away from jail who don't need to be there while ensuring the safety of the community by making sure we have the right facility for those who do. This should be our goal. Proceeding with the design work that's underway on the already downsized project is the fastest, most cost effective path to closing the CCB. This veto allows that work to continue, keeping us on a path to progress in all aspects of our criminal justice system, not just our programming.

I am also vetoing language in lines 115-126 that wasn't considered by the Board until the night the operating budget was adopted. This amendment requiring a study and a plan was presented as a rationale for Supervisors to delete case manager positions from the budget in favor of social workers, a move that was not approved by the Health and Human Needs Committee during budget deliberations.

In the wake of broad support from across the community, the provision to delete these case managers - and the diversity their hiring would enhance - was ultimately defeated. State and national data has clearly demonstrated bias exists in the certification required to obtain a social worker license. Our workforce needs to reflect who it works for and implementing case managers where appropriate is a tangible step we can take to better ensure the county can hire those with lived experience.

The amendment I vetoed was redundant. The Department of Human Services already has an equity plan. It's been on file with the Department of Equity and Inclusion for years and is reviewed and updated. The plan is readily available and the most recent copy of it is attached.

The county has embarked on a lot of plans and studies relating to equity over the years. We know what needs to be done to diversify our workforce and we are making tangible progress. Choices on whether to add new case managers or limit hiring to only those who can pass a social worker exam have a direct impact on the racial diversity of our service delivery. We can do more to help set our

departments up for success in this regard, but more action is the answer not studying again something that's already been studied.

We did a number of great things in crafting the 2023 Dane County budget. We met the moment on a number of fronts. The coming year will bring progress on the work we all hold dearly. We have much to be proud of in this budget and I look forward to continued work with the County Board on meeting the needs of our thriving, growing community