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Secretary Gassman Outlines Governor's Working Family Agenda at Head Start Conference

Wisconsin Dells – Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today addressed the Wisconsin Head Start Association's 5th Annual Training Conference at the Kalahari resort in Wisconsin Dells. During her address, she reiterated Governor Doyle's State of the State message that Wisconsin can lead the nation in health care reform, providing coverage for all children and hardworking families of the state.

"Wisconsin Head Start Association (WHSA) currently serves 16,000 children and families, making WHSA a critical partner in the Governor's efforts to support Wisconsin children and families," Secretary Gassman said. "DWD is at the heart of the Governor's agenda which emphasizes the value of early education and small classrooms to help our children, our future workforce, gain a solid foundation to succeed in school and in work."

In Governor Doyle's recent State of the State address, he proposed a new Department of Children and Families, which would be the first cabinet agency devoted exclusively to vulnerable children and families. Secretary Gassman highlighted a number of initiatives the Governor unveiled, proposals that will be carried forward in his state budget, which he will present on Tuesday, February 13th:

- BadgerCare Plus coverage for every child, allowing low-income families to simply enroll, while permitting those with higher incomes to buy coverage, starting at \$10 a month;
- Expansion of BadgerCare Plus coverage to include low-income adults without children;
- Launch of the Wisconsin Covenant, a promise to Wisconsin eighth-graders that if they work hard, earn good grades, participate in their community, and be good citizens during high school, they will be guaranteed a spot in one of Wisconsin's universities or technical colleges;
- Creation of the Department of Children and Families, dedicated to improving the lives of children and families. The new agency would draw programs, such as child support and Wisconsin Works, from DWD, and foster care and childcare licensing, from the Department of Health and Family Services. Combining such programs into one agency will streamline the system, making it easier for families to navigate and get the help they need.

As a member of Governor Doyle's cabinet, Secretary Gassman leads the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and oversees 1,900 employees charged with strengthening Wisconsin's workforce.

Head Start is a Federal program for preschool children from low-income families. It also provides a comprehensive child development program for children and their families.

Wisconsin Head Start Association (WHSA) is a private, not-for-profit membership organization representing more than 16,000 children. A network of community-based, non-profit corporations, Indian reservation governments, school districts, Cooperative Education Service Agencies, county governments, and a university administer the Wisconsin Head Start programs.