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**Celebrating the Elimination of Birth Cost Recovery in Dane County
at the HealthWatch Wisconsin Awards Ceremony**

At an awards luncheon hosted in conjunction with the 13th Annual HealthWatch Wisconsin Conference: “2020 Visions and Decisions: Health Insurance. Social Justice. Health Equity,” individuals and organizations were recognized for exemplary work in our community in the areas of health care advocacy, outreach, media, as well as outstanding elected officials. The elimination of Birth Cost Recovery in Dane County was a strong theme among this year’s class of honorees. Read HealthWatch Wisconsin’s comments as presented:

2019 Elected Official of the Year - Joe Parisi

The HealthWatch Wisconsin Elected Official of the Year award is meant to celebrate an elected official at any level of government, local, county, state, or national, who is committed to improving the health of her constituents in Wisconsin. This individual uses his service and leadership to advocate for and advance the mission of accessible healthcare and coverage—especially vulnerable or underrepresented populations in his community.

HealthWatch Wisconsin presents the 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Elected Official of the Year Award to Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. In the nomination of County Executive Parisi for this award, it states, “We specifically applaud his work that led to removal of the Birth Cost Recovery policy in Dane County by the close of 2019.”

In his 2020 budget, County Executive Parisi wrote that “the racial disparities in Birth Cost Recovery are stark;” thus, his advocacy against and the consequent elimination of the policy effective January 1, 2020 is a **major step** toward reducing racial health and income disparities in Dane County.

As many folks here know, the inequity of the Birth Cost Recovery policy is an issue HealthWatch Wisconsin has been fighting against for years – decades even. Because it was a long term issue, and one that’s pretty deep in the Medicaid weeds! In the last few years we renamed it “The Birth Tax.” Wisconsin is the MOST AGGRESSIVE collector – Milwaukee County leading the charge, and Dane County until recently, wasn’t too far behind.

Over time, a lot more research had been done and a lot more data was collected:

- The importance of reducing stressors in a pregnant woman’s life
- The impact on birth outcomes and infant mortality
- The race and cultural inequities in how these policies play out
- The fact that Birth Cost Recovery is not child support
- The changing dynamic of the modern family



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We know there is a lot more to these bigger conversations. Eliminating the birth tax in Dane County was just one issue, one stressor in a young family's life. But it was one we could actually do something about!

County Executive Parisi eliminating the policy in Dane County was a huge success, one we can all celebrate – and one other counties across Wisconsin can emulate!

Help me congratulate Dane County Executive Joe Parisi, our 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Elected Official of the Year, for exemplary leadership by an elected official toward reducing race, health, & income disparities by ending the controversial Birth Cost Recovery policy in Dane County.

2019 Outstanding Media Effort of the Year - Erik Gunn

HealthWatch Wisconsin's Award for Outstanding Media is awarded to an individual or institution that demonstrates the **power** of the media, whether in traditional print, an investigative report, a blog, a video, a podcast, or even social media. Exemplary media shines a light on topics and issues, critical or complimentary to accessing health care and coverage. Media that is trusted in fact, interpretation, or analysis, providing an important insight into the health of the people of Wisconsin.

We are proud to present Erik Gunn with the 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Award for Outstanding Media for select articles in the Wisconsin Examiner, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news site offering fresh perspective on politics and policy in Wisconsin.

It was Erik's series on Wisconsin's Birth Cost Recovery Policy in 2019 that led to his nomination for this award, including "[Bill Seeks Payments from Unwed Fathers](#)," and "[Is 'Birth Cost Recovery' On Its Way Out?](#)" These pieces accurately captured many of the **nuances** of the birth cost recovery policy that other reporters or commentators missed or mischaracterized over the years. Erik's reporting triggered deeper review by policymakers and movement toward greater equity and winds of change as several counties reevaluated their stance on this controversial practice.

Like I said earlier, this particular award seeks to recognize those who provide critical thoughts, analyses, and insights into issues affecting the health and social justice of individuals in Wisconsin—Erik's writing did just that. Erik gave us a clear and concise look at the past, present, and future of the policy. It reminds all of us how the media can powerfully break down complicated health issues in ways that everyone can understand in order to promote a more complete understanding on the ways in which laws and policies impact disparity populations.

Before joining the Wisconsin Examiner, Erik had 24 years of freelance writing under his belt, for sources like Milwaukee Magazine, Isthmus, and The Progressive, winning awards for



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investigative reporting, feature writing, beat coverage, business writing, and commentary. We're happy to add our award to that growing list of accolades.

Help me congratulate Erik Gunn our 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Outstanding Media Effort of the Year award winner for making a difference by reporting with **needed depth** on the controversial Birth Cost Recovery policy for the Wisconsin Examiner

2019 Outreach Effort of the Year - Foundation for Black Women's Wellness

The HealthWatch Wisconsin Outreach Effort of the Year award is designed to recognize an individual, group, collaboration, or project that increases awareness and knowledge of health care and coverage, including social aspects of healthcare, healthcare systems, health equity, or community-based programs.

This effort could include projects that - through tenacity, creativity, and determination - achieved demonstrative outcomes for the effort's target audience.

HealthWatch Wisconsin is pleased to celebrate The Foundation for Black Women's Wellness as the 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Outreach Effort of the Year.

The Foundation began around 2011 with the vision of founding CEO and President Lisa Peyton-Caire. Since day one, the Foundation's mission has been: "to eliminate health disparities and other barriers impacting the lives of women and girls of African descent...through education and outreach, advocacy, support circles, and powerful partnerships"--with extra focus on black maternal health.

Their efforts have intensified with each passing year. In 2019, the Foundation submitted a report titled *Saving Our Babies: Low Birthweight Engagement*, shining a spotlight on Dane County – it was a wakeup call to address the racial inequities in the community.

Wisconsin has among the highest black infant mortality rate in the nation. Dane County is no exception. In response, the Foundation proposed new community investments, development of a Black Maternal Health Alliance, and neighborhood-based action teams.

And their momentum continues. Earlier this year, the Foundation opened the doors to the brand new Black Women's Wellness Center on Madison's west side. It's a physical place to build relationships and community, helping make the connections women need to succeed.

But the Foundation isn't done yet – the first annual Wisconsin Black Maternal and Child Health Summit is scheduled for 2021.

Help me congratulate the Foundation for Black Women's Wellness, our 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Outreach Effort of the Year award winner in recognition of exemplary community



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work to promote systems change to help improve birth outcomes and lower infant mortality rates for black women in Dane County.

2019 Advocate of the Year - Agustin “Auggie” Guevara Paramo

HealthWatch Wisconsin created the Advocate of the Year award to recognize an individual advancing access to health care and coverage in Wisconsin, prioritizing public health, health equity, or social justice in his advocacy. The ideal recipient is an individual who regularly goes above and beyond to meet the needs of individuals and families, promoting improved connections to health care, coverage, or services in the community.

We are so pleased to recognize Agustin Guevara Paramo as the 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Advocate of the Year. When you see him in the halls of UnityPoint Health – Meriter hospital, it’s ok to call him “Auggie.”

Auggie has worked as an Interpreter in Madison for many years. The nomination of Auggie for this award said that “Auggie goes above and beyond to help the patients he’s working with. In addition to the crucial work helping patients communicate with their medical providers, Auggie also helps patients navigate their health coverage options. Auggie screens patients to determine what they may be eligible for and will help with applications for BC+ and other Medicaid programs. In addition Auggie provides information and guidance to patients on hospital charity care programs. His tireless work over the years has undoubtedly helped countless people in our community get the care they need and avoid medical debt.”

We are honored to recognize Auggie for his dedicated interpretive services to non-English speaking patients seeking health care, coverage, & services. Please help me congratulate Auggie, our 2019 HealthWatch Wisconsin Advocate of the Year.