



Parents need to earn \$47,667

Study analyzes what it takes to raise family of 4

By MEG JONES

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Ask any parent how much it costs to raise a family, and they'll say "a lot." Just how much may be higher than many think.

In Milwaukee County, it costs \$47,667 to meet the basic needs of a family of four with two working adults and two children, one preschool and one school age, according to a report released Tuesday.

For the same family of four in Waukesha County, it's \$51,343; and in Dane County, \$49,434.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin charts the actual cost of living and working in Wisconsin by measuring how much a family must earn to pay for housing, food, child care, health care, transportation, taxes and other necessities. The figures do not include public assistance or help from family and friends.

Since the last study in 2000, the figures have risen slightly in many counties, though Waukesha County saw an 11% increase for a family of four, the latest report says.

Roberta Gassman, secretary of the state Department of Workforce Development, said the self-sufficiency standard report

shows the need for an increase in the minimum wage of \$5.15 in Wisconsin.

"The report really underscores the challenges, particularly that low-income people can face in meeting the basic needs of their families," Gassman said.

For a single parent supporting a family, a minimum wage job isn't going to pay all the bills. The report found that in Milwaukee County a single parent raising one preschooler and one school-age child on a minimum wage income would be able to cover only 29% of their basic needs.

A state advisory council has recommended increasing the minimum wage to \$5.70 and then \$6.50 a year later in Wisconsin. One option being considered would allow employers to pay teen workers less than their adult counterparts to allow employers to save money on salaries for those who might not be supporting a family. Any change in the minimum wage would have to be approved by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Jim Doyle, who appointed the minimum wage group.

But Gassman admits that simply raising the minimum wage isn't the answer.

"This report points out there are particular barriers women face. If we're going to help more low-income women have more opportunities, going to a higher minimum wage will be one step," Gassman said. But "it makes the case for the importance of job training and education."

The report was done by the Wisconsin Women's Network in partnership with Wider Opportunities for Women, a national women's employment organization.

The author of the report said child care costs in Wisconsin are more expensive than in other states.

"A lot of people feel it's good child care" in Wisconsin, said Diana Pearce, a senior lecturer at the University of Washington. "The cost of child care is a good measure of its quality. That's good for children, but it's hard for parents' budgets."

In Milwaukee County, the monthly average cost for child care for one infant and one preschooler is \$1,567, and \$1,212 for one preschooler and one school-age child, according to the report.

"It would be very difficult as a single mom to go to work," said Mona Steele, project coordinator for the Wisconsin Women's Network. "You want to make sure the child is in good day care, otherwise you'd be worrying all the time. But you have to find a way to pay for that."

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin report is available at www.wiwomensnetwork.org.