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Wisconsin's Public Sector is Leaner than Most other States'

Wisconsin has fewer public employees for our size than most other states, according to a new analysis by the Wisconsin Budget Project. The number of public employees in Wisconsin has generally fallen over time, and current levels of public employment are significantly lower than they were fifteen years ago.

Wisconsin has 2.1% fewer state and local government employees per capita than the national average. Wisconsin ranks 35th in the number of government workers per population.

“It might surprise some people to know that only 15 other states had a leaner public sector than Wisconsin, but we’ve had fewer government workers per population than the national average for at least two decades now,” said Tamarine Cornelius, who conducted the analysis.

Having fewer government employees means that Wisconsin governments spend less on public payrolls. For each person that lived in the state, Wisconsin spent 6.3% less than the national average on public payrolls.

Another reason public payroll costs in Wisconsin are low is that public employees in Wisconsin earn less than the national average. The payroll per employee in Wisconsin was 4.2% below the national average.

Most public employees work in schools, according to the analysis. Six out of ten government employees work in education, mostly in K-12 schools. A smaller number work in higher education. Other major work areas for public employees include health and human services, police and fire, corrections, and transportation.

“Public employees in Wisconsin teach our children, repair our transportation network, and keep our communities safe – all activities that help make Wisconsin a good place to do business and raise families,” said Cornelius. “We need to make sure we have enough public employees to have the kind of efficient, effective public sector that can improve the state’s economic competitiveness as well as the quality of life for Wisconsin families.”

The Wisconsin Budget Project’s analysis is based on state and local government employment figures collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, which publishes public employment levels for

March of each year. The Census Bureau recently released government employment figures for March 2015.

The Wisconsin Budget Project, an initiative of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, is an independent Madison-based research group that focuses on tax and budget policy.

The full analysis is on the Wisconsin Budget Project website: Wisconsin's Public Sector is Leaner than Most Other States'.

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