

COUNTY EXECUTIVE DELAGRAVE'S 2023 STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

(As prepared for delivery)

Mister Chairman, Mister Vice Chairman, Members of the County Board, Youth in Governance representatives, distinguished guests, and residents of Racine County.

This is my ninth State of the County, and I'm honored to reach this milestone and have this unique opportunity. An opportunity no previous Racine County executive has had.

As my daughter would say, "Dad, it's not because you are doing a good job; nobody else wanted the job."

Upon reflection, she is right. I haven't done a good job. We have done a great job in transforming Racine County government for the people of the greatest county in Wisconsin. A government focused on (and recognized statewide for) delivering exceptional, top-notch services with the wellbeing of its residents at the heart of its decision-making while remaining outstanding, fiscally conservative stewards of the resources granted to us by our taxpayers.

As your county executive, I am and always will be honored to serve you, and I am so excited to share with you tonight my vision for a safer, healthier, stronger, and growing Racine County.

That being said, I want to express my gratitude to the hardworking and dedicated individuals who call Racine County home. As a life-long Racine County resident, I am proud of the accomplishments our county has made during my eight years as your county executive. We have made continuous progress, but we know there are always challenges on the horizon. I am ready and motivated to serve you for another four years, and tonight I will share some of our shared successes and my long-term vision for the future of Racine County.

Our county has faced, or taken on proactively, unprecedented challenges these last few years, but we have always come together for the betterment of all. I am proud of the resilience and perseverance that our residents have shown in the face of adversity, and I am confident that we will work together to continue keeping this county No. 1 out of the 72 in the state of Wisconsin.

As we look ahead, I am committed to ensuring that Racine County remains a great place to live, work, and raise a family. That we will continue to innovate, leverage, work together with our community stakeholders, and invest in communities to create a safer, healthier, growing, and more vibrant county.

I want to address an important issue tonight, one that is critical to the future of our county and our state – migration. As detailed in a recent piece entitled "Moving In? Exploring Wisconsin's Migration Challenges," without an increase in migration from other states or countries, by 2030 the state's prime working age population (25 to 64) will likely shrink by an estimated 130,000 people.

Tonight, I'm officially sounding the alarm – this is an enormous challenge, but at the same time, a huge opportunity. Migration could have a significant impact on every aspect of our lives: our economy, workforce, quality of life, health care, education, transportation, infrastructure, and housing.

Some noteworthy facts from the article include:

- Of more than 460,000 families that moved out of the state from 2012-20, more than two-thirds moved to a state out of the region, one that does not border Wisconsin.

- Among Wisconsin families who moved during 2012-20, high-income families were more likely to leave the state than low-income families.
- Over the 10 years, net migration into Wisconsin based on Census Bureau figures was down nearly a third compared to the prior decade and 75% from the 1990s.

These statistics should create a sense of urgency; we need to work together to make Racine County an attractive place to live and work. We need to cultivate, or take advantage of, the numerous opportunities in southeast Wisconsin to attract real, substantial growth.

But we also need to address some of the challenges that we face as a community. We need to invest in our infrastructure, yes – our roads, bridges, sewers, and water systems, but we need to include things like housing, business growth, education, and economic mobility as infrastructure. I would agree that creating affordable workforce housing options for people at all income levels is infrastructure.

We need to support our children, the future of our county, and provide more opportunities for lifelong learning (while acknowledging that learning begins even before a child goes to school). Also, to improve on social, recreational, and competitive opportunities.

By working together and focusing on these priorities, we can make Racine County an even better place, a unique place. An attractive place for families and new economic development, so we can ensure our county remains strong and vibrant for generations to come.

However, I am confident that by working together, we can achieve this vision of real substantive growth. We will continue to partner with local businesses and community organizations to drive economic growth, create economic mobility and opportunities that will improve the quality of life for our residents. Businesses – small, medium, and large – are the backbone of our county.

With that in mind, as a lot of you know, we recently approved an unprecedented economic development with Microsoft. Landing Microsoft alongside Foxconn in TID 5 in Mount Pleasant didn't occur overnight. I would like to recognize Jenny Trick with RCEDC and Jim Paetsch with M7 and so many others for their hard work in sharing the economic opportunities available along the I-94 corridor in Racine County. I also want to recognize our Racine County Board for its strong leadership, not only in approving this billion-dollar investment, but also in its continued support of our county's long-term economic possibilities. We are excited to welcome this investment, and we also recognize that we have presented a tremendous opportunity for companies, like Microsoft, to invest. This development will help us in our efforts to grow.

As you also know, I am thrilled to announce a \$25 million investment in an integrated mental health facility to serve Racine County residents. This facility will include a first-of-its-kind substance abuse residential treatment center and will increase mental health access and quality of mental health services for all.

We understand that mental health and substance abuse treatment are major concerns for our community. The new facility will provide comprehensive mental health and substance abuse treatment services, including outpatient therapy, medication management, and peer support groups.

One of the key benefits of this facility is that it removes barriers to access. We recognize that many individuals in our community are having trouble accessing care, such as transportation and financial

constraints. By bringing all of these services under one roof, we are making it easier for everyone to get the help they need.

The proposed substance abuse residential treatment facility will be the first of its kind in our region and will provide a safe and supportive environment for individuals to receive intensive care. We believe that this facility will be a game-changer in the fight against addiction in our community.

This investment represents a significant step forward for our county, and we are proud to lead the way in prioritizing mental health and substance abuse treatment. We believe that by investing in these services, we are not only improving individual outcomes but also strengthening our community as a whole and, as a result, creating growth.

Last State of the County I warned you about the potential for a violent summer and as a result we took serious action. Tonight, I take immense pride in Racine County's efforts to establish the Violent Crime Reduction Initiative and enhance interdepartmental collaboration between our Sheriff's Office, District Attorney, Human Services, and Performance and Analytics Department. As we head into the summer months, I want our residents to know that we are working with law enforcement officers, first responders, and community partners in a coordinated effort with your safety in mind. Regardless of your neighborhood or municipality, you have the inherent right to feel safe in our community. We recognize that relying solely on the criminal justice system to reduce violent crime rates in our community is not a sustainable solution. Hence, our approach has been and will continue to be to work hand in hand with community organizations and law enforcement agencies to build trust and create a more cohesive network of support for our residents.

Our Violence Interrupter model is the perfect illustration of interdepartmental collaboration. This Violence Interrupter model responds 24/7 to gun violence in our community, supports families in need and can help reduce the threat of retaliation while de-escalating tense situations. Integrating the work from the District Attorney, Sheriff's Office, Performance and Analytics, and Human Services has been one of our greatest successes. We have found that the County is leading the way in both youth and adult violence interruption. As a result, the role of our current Community Violence Prevention Specialist is being elevated to a Division of Violence Prevention to encompass Maurice Horton's additional scope of responsibilities.

Our commitment to ending the violence is unwavering, and we will continue to work tirelessly towards our goal of creating a safer and stronger county.

As your county executive, I am deeply concerned about the rising number of fentanyl-related deaths in our community. Fentanyl is a lethal synthetic opioid, deadly even to the touch, and responsible for countless deaths annually throughout our state and country.

That is why I am proud to announce that we are launching a comprehensive outreach campaign to raise awareness of this toxic scourge and to help keep our residents safe.

Today, on Fentanyl Awareness Day, we stand in solidarity with communities across the nation to bring attention to the dangers of fentanyl and to promote strategies to prevent overdose deaths. I also want to take a moment of silence to remember the lives lost to this deadly drug. We also remember their families, who are left to grieve and pick up the pieces.

Our outreach efforts, spearheaded by our Public Health Division under the guidance of Public Health Officer Jeff Langlieb and his talented staff, will include a coordinated marketing effort featuring print and digital media content along with an impressive social media engagement strategy.

We have also taken several concrete steps to safeguard our residents from the dangers of fentanyl and illegal drugs in our schools, on our streets and in our homes. To illustrate the terrible impact of opioids, last year our medical examiner's office identified 39 toxicity related deaths and our community has experienced three opioid spike alerts this year alone.

In that spirit of collaboration, I mentioned earlier, we are working closely with our Sheriff's Office to support our law enforcement officers as they crack down on the illegal trafficking of fentanyl in our community. Just last month our Racine County Board of Supervisors voted to approve the investment of \$100k to support our deputies with handheld laser drug testing equipment. These state-of-the-art tools will be invaluable in our war against fentanyl and illegal drugs in our community. And we are working to expand access to addiction treatment and support services for those struggling with substance use disorder.

In Racine County, we know that we cannot fight this battle alone. That is why we are calling on all members of our community to join us in our efforts to raise awareness of fentanyl and to prevent overdose deaths. By working together, we can make a real difference in the lives of our friends, family members, and neighbors.

A flourishing Racine County begins with an investment in our youth, because one way a county is measured is in the value it places on its young people. As I said during the Budget Address and at the outset of this speech, we have to support our children and youth at the beginning of their educational journey and give them the tools they need to be successful, to grow and thrive. Our Public Health Division and community partner Higher Expectations have begun the outreach we discussed last year by engaging key stakeholders with experience in early childhood education to co-create a strategy for success. As I stated before, two-thirds of Wisconsin children aren't reading proficiently by 3rd grade. I look forward to seeing the solutions proposed by the newly created literacy steering committee, composed of a diverse group of local subject-matter experts and parents, as they create solutions that best fit the needs of Racine County residents. I am confident at the budget address in October we will announce some goals and ideas to make Racine County a national leader in literacy.

As important as this literacy initiative is to our community, we must also consider the physical spaces that we inhabit, the roads we travel on, and the public spaces we enjoy with our friends and families. Our parks and infrastructure play a crucial role in the well-being of our residents and how we will grow our county in the future, and we must invest in these areas to ensure that our community remains vibrant and sustainable. With that in mind, let us turn our attention to the ways we can continue to improve our parks and infrastructure for the benefit of all who call this county home and will call our county home in the future.

As many of you may know, we have placed a strong emphasis on infrastructure enhancements, which includes everything from improving our highways and roads to enhancing our parks and green spaces. Before COVID we put an emphasis on parks and now since the pandemic we know quality amenities, especially parks, are important to our citizens. In fact, as you are aware, Racine County has undergone a parks renaissance in recent years, with an impressive transformation of our public spaces.

In a responsible way without exposing our taxpayers, we're ready to take these valuable amenities to the next level. By prudently investing in our public works and parks, we will continue to create an attractive county for our residents to be proud of. Not only will this improve the overall quality of life for our community, but it will also help to attract new businesses and families to the area. Again, real substantial growth.

I am so proud to have a strong portfolio of parks, which has been further enhanced by the addition of an asset like Franksville Memorial Park last year. This beautiful park has already become a beloved destination for our community, and we look forward to continuing to invest in its growth and development. Pritchard Park is a prime example of how a \$2.25 million initial investment has made this location a destination for outdoor recreational opportunities including pickleball, with outstanding facilities like the SC Johnson Community Aquatic Center and the Multi-Purpose Field. Soon, work will begin on an important new building at Quarry Lake Park, our Cliffside Park has seen a record number of camping reservations and we have made enhancements to Case-Eagle and Eagle Lake Parks. These are just high-level, noteworthy highlights from last year, but we also recently formed a Parks Task Force to look at the long-term future of our parks and strategically plan out the enhancements and changes necessary to keep our parks among the best in southeast Wisconsin and across the state. The work is already underway, the task force has met twice, and we look forward to the recommendations that come out of this group.

As I transition into my third term, we also transition a new leader within the Department of Public Works & Development Services. We are excited to welcome Roley Behm, who has been with the county for more than six years, as the new head of this important department, and we are confident that he will continue to build upon the work that former Director Julie Anderson and the rest of our team have accomplished. With his experience and dedication, we are eager to see the future of our parks under his leadership.

Last year our Public Works team leveraged \$1.5 million in state funding for projects on CTH K, CTH P and CTH U, and saved our residents hundreds of thousands of dollars. The safety of our residents as they travel across the county is one of our top priorities this year as two important roundabout safety projects continue to their next phase. Roley and his team will continue to look for opportunities to partner at the local, state, and federal levels to deliver roads our residents can be proud of for years to come.

Now we'll move to one of my favorite parts of the State of the County, recognizing the recipients of our annual Impact Awards. I can't think of two more deserving recipients for this year's honors.

I am honored to be here today to present an Impact Award to Chief Deputy Jim Weidner of the Racine County Sheriff's Office.

First, thank you to Sheriff Schmaling for allowing Chief Deputy Weidner to support these initiatives as many are outside of his traditional job duties. Second, Chief Deputy Weidner is involved because he wants the county to be at its best. Pure and simple.

I have had the pleasure of working closely with Chief Deputy Weidner on numerous county initiatives. He has been a team player and a pivotal member of many ongoing county projects, including the Violent Crime Reduction Initiative, the construction of our new Youth Development and Care Center, improving West End Fire/EMS response, and Next Generation 911.

His commitment to public service and his tireless efforts have helped us achieve great success in these critical projects. His unwavering dedication to serving our community and his selfless attitude have made him an invaluable asset to our team.

Chief Deputy Weidner embodies the very essence of a public servant. He consistently gives his maximum effort, always putting the needs of the community before his own. His contributions have been instrumental in making Racine County a safer place to live.

On behalf of the entire county, I am proud to present Chief Deputy Jim Weidner with the Impact Award. This award recognizes his outstanding contributions to our county and his unwavering dedication to serving our community. Congratulations, Chief Deputy Weidner, and thank you for all that you do.

It is my great pleasure to be here today to present the Impact Award to Linda Hoover, the CEO and President of Educators Credit Union.

As many of you know, Educators Credit Union has been a valuable partner to our county for many years, providing critical support to numerous county events and initiatives. Their commitment to our community has been nothing short of exemplary, and we are grateful for all that they have done to help make our county a better place.

Tonight, I would like to extend a special thank you to Educators Credit Union for their generous donation of over \$28,000 to support the SC Johnson Aquatic Center during the 2022 season. This donation will help ensure that the aquatic center remains a vibrant and accessible community resource for years to come, and we are deeply appreciative of their support.

Linda Hoover, as CEO and President of Educators Credit Union, has been instrumental in guiding the organization's philanthropic efforts and fostering a strong culture of community engagement. Her leadership has helped make Educators Credit Union a shining example of what it means to be a responsible corporate citizen, and we are proud to honor her with the Impact Award tonight.

So, on behalf of the county and all its residents, I want to extend our heartfelt thanks to Educators Credit Union and Linda Hoover for their ongoing partnership and commitment to making our community a better place. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition, and we look forward to continuing our work together for many years to come. I ask where our county would be without Educators cheering us on and being so community oriented.

Congratulations to both of our Impact Award recipients!

Racine County continues to focus on being an employer of choice. Hats off to Human Resources Director Sarah Street and her team as they have taken a creative and human-focused approach to recruit, retain, and inspire our workforce in the face of an ever-competitive job market.

As you are aware, inflation and the rising costs of healthcare have been a significant point of concern, and the impact of COVID-19 has further delayed any potential relief. To address this issue, I am pleased to announce that we are implementing a new high-deductible health plan option that will be available in 2024. This plan will help us control healthcare costs while ensuring that our employees have access to high-quality healthcare.

Earlier this spring we kicked off our wellness initiative and it was a resounding success. Thank you to our HR team for leading this effort and supporting new programming focused on promoting employee wellness, including fitness challenges, while reminding our workforce of the robust benefits available from our Employee Clinic and Employee Assistance Program.

I am also pleased to report that we have made significant strides in improving the culture of our county workforce. Many of you joined us for the night at the Milwaukee Brewers game last fall, a tradition that will continue this September, and we will host a Racine County employee night at the SC Johnson Community Aquatic Center on August 3. I believe these initiatives have helped us avoid the employee turnover municipalities and counties across the state are experiencing. We don't take our employees for granted, and our Human Resources Department has been at the heart of our mission to recognize and thank them for choosing Racine County as their employer.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for your continued support of Racine County. Together, we will build a brighter future for our families, our communities, and our county. Let us embrace the challenges ahead with positivity and optimism, and work together to create a safer, healthier, and stronger Racine County.

I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest appreciation for your outstanding contributions to the success of Racine County. Your dedication to innovation and trailblazing has made a significant impact on our community, and I am honored to work alongside such courageous leaders who are not afraid to tackle critical initiatives like mental health and youth justice reform.

Through your tireless efforts and determination, we have been able to achieve many great things together. We've accomplished some heavy lifts. We have created opportunities for our youth, improved access to healthcare, and worked tirelessly to address the challenges facing our most vulnerable residents. Looking ahead, I foresee some tough decisions awaiting us as we prepare the 2024 budget, but I know that we have the best and brightest Racine County has to offer sitting here today ready to make those difficult decisions.

I want to personally thank each and every one of you for your invaluable contributions to our community. Your leadership, dedication, and hard work have helped us to achieve great success, and I am grateful for your continued support and partnership.

As we move forward, I am confident that we will continue to achieve great things together. Let us remain committed to our shared vision for Racine County and continue to work collaboratively to grow a brighter future for all our residents.

Progress in Racine County is not just about building infrastructure or boosting economic growth, it's about the positive difference we make in the lives of our residents every day. When we focus on creating opportunities, supporting families, and building a strong community, we create a legacy that will last for generations to come.

Thank you. May God bless you and may God bless Racine County.