



WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE  
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

December 12, 2017

Assembly Committee on Mental Health  
Representative Tittl, Chair  
State Capitol, Room 219 North  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Tittl and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on AB 631. Many family members of people with disabilities are also caregivers. BPDD supports AB 631.

Families often provide daily supports including personal care, supervision, service coordination, and medical and financial management. Families can also play a key role in creating opportunities that lead to greater community integration and less service utilization. Nationally, families provide more than \$475 billion per year in unpaid direct care for their family members, which would otherwise have to be paid for by Medicaid.

A 2016 AARP report found 78% of family caregivers are incurring out of pocket costs as a result of caregiving. These out of pocket expenses amounted to be an average of \$6,954 a year — nearly 20 percent of caregiver's income. For family caregivers earning less than \$32,500, an average of 44 percent of their annual income is spent on caregiving.

The same study found family caregivers reported dipping into savings, cutting back on personal spending, saving less for retirement or taking out loans to make ends meet. More than half of family caregivers reported a work-related strain, such as having to take unpaid time off.

Especially with the shortage of community-based personal care and other home care workers, we hear from families across the state that they have often had to rearrange schedules and even leave their jobs to fill in caregiving gaps. An estimated 40% of the overall community workforce includes family members.

AB 631 provides important recognition of the significant uncompensated expenses that many family caregivers incur when supporting and caring for their loved ones. While the \$1000 tax credit is insufficient to reimburse the high level of expenses many caregivers contribute, it is a welcome gesture to the many families who are devoting part of their lives and income to the care of their relatives.

BPDD is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities.

Our role is to seek continuous improvement across all systems—education, transportation, health care, employment, etc.—that touch the lives of people with disabilities. Our work requires us to have a long-term vision of public policy that not only sees current systems as they are, but how these systems could be made better for current and future generations of people with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beth Swedeen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and 'S'.

Beth Swedeen, Executive Director, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities