



March 13, 2019

Representative Swearingen (Chair)
Assembly Committee on State Affairs
Wisconsin State Capitol, Room 123 W
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Rep. Swearingen and Committee members:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 20.

Many state agency administrative rules still have the outdated and offensive term “mental retardation” on the books. This bill replaces the phrases “mental retardation” with “intellectual disabilities” in state administrative rules. Language is important, and our laws should reflect terminology to which our community identifies.

Unfortunately, many people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) can recall times when professionals, adults, or peers used this outdated term as a descriptor that defines them as a person. This word is never used as a compliment; by its definition it is a label that implies lesser-than, and in common usage it has been regarded as an insult. The term also harkens back to public policies that are rooted in segregation, discrimination, and views of people with disabilities that see only limitations and diagnosis rather than individuals and capacity.

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 (more about BPDD https://wi-bpdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Legislative_Overview_BPDD.pdf).

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,

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