



May 8, 2017

Senator Alberta Darling
Joint Committee on Finance Co-Chair
Room 317 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Representative John Nygren
Joint Committee on Finance Co-Chair
Room 309 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Darling, Representative Nygren, and Joint Finance Committee members:

Thank you for your interest in improving transportation options for people with disabilities that allow them to be contributing members of their communities. Improved transportation leads directly to employment and other opportunities for people with disabilities.

As you consider the transportation budget, we believe it is vitally important to support people with disabilities who rely on publicly funded transportation options. Thus, we write to support increase in public transit funding and specialized transportation funding of at least three percent. We oppose consideration of any proposals which target county specific transit funding. We recognize that funding increases in existing programs alone will not solve the transportation barriers faced by people with disabilities: investment in innovative solutions is necessary. Thus, we also propose a pilot project through the Fast Forward program that can spur innovation and increase employment.

Last year BPDD talked with more than 1000 members of the disability community around the state and identified community integrated employment and transportation as priority areas that would most improve people's lives and reduce the use of public supports.

Barriers to transportation for people with disabilities include; limited transportation on weekends and evenings, transportation options or routes not going where people need to go, rides being cancelled or not arriving on time, and lack of accessible transportation. Other barriers to transportation include high fares or unaffordable rates, one-ride one-purpose programs that do not allow people to use the same ride to accomplish multiple tasks, and fragmented transportation systems that fail to connect to each other (between towns, across county lines etc.). Most people with developmental disabilities in Wisconsin neither drive nor own cars.

Many members of the direct care workforce that people with disabilities rely on to stay in their homes are low-income and face similar transportation barriers. Transportation costs associated with commuting to client homes is cited as one reason why many workers leave the direct care workforce.

Access to reliable, affordable transportation would complement other budget efforts to relieve the workforce crisis.

Various local communities across our state have developed unique solutions to transportation barriers, but these local ideas need support to be sustained and scaled.

We propose investing in transportation pilot projects to give local control and seed funding to communities to expand transportation options that work for them to improve capacity for people with disabilities and other groups (older adults, low income adults) who face transportation barriers. We have provided specific suggestions on how pilot projects could be structured within the 2017-19 budget on the following page.

Transportation Pilot projects

1. Provide additional funding to the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Wisconsin Fast Forward grant appropriation line for the purpose of transportation pilot projects that are directly related to improved employment and community engagement for people with disabilities and other low-income adults.
 - a. DWD will fund no less than three and no more than 6 pilot projects
 - b. Pilot projects will run for at least 3 years and no more than five years
 - c. At least 1/3 of pilot projects will be located in rural areas.
2. DWD with the assistance of stakeholders will establish performance measures and evaluation criteria for each pilot project to assess effectiveness of meeting the following outcomes:
 - a. Facilitating business/workforce development, and establishing commuter options
 - b. Ability for Medicaid recipients to connect to employment and community
 - c. Affordability and accessibility of transportation option for low income adults, older adults, and people with disabilities
 - d. Connection to major destinations (commercial centers, educational and training centers, medical, civic, regional destinations)
 - e. Access to shared ride services in urban and rural markets for low income people with disabilities, older adults, and working adults.
3. DWD should submit a report to JFC annually on each pilot project until the pilot is concluded and then should submit a final report with an assessment of the effectiveness of the pilot project and recommendations.

Lisa Pugh, Executive Director. The Arc Wisconsin

Dan Idzikowski, Executive Director, Disability Rights Wisconsin

Cindy Bentley, Executive Director, People First Wisconsin

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