



April 13, 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 the opportunity to attend public hearings and comment on the proposed 2017-19 state budget. The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) appreciates the work this committee has done in previous budgets to improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). We are pleased that the Family Care/IRIS expansion that the Joint Finance Committee approved in the 2015-17 budget means Wisconsin is poised to become only the second state in the nation to eliminate adult long-term care waiting lists.

Last year BPDD talked with more than 1000 members of the disability community around the state on key areas that would most improve people's lives and reduce the use of public supports. Two top priority areas emerged: community integrated employment and better transportation. The Governor's budget includes several provisions that ensure children with disabilities are healthy and better prepared to enter the workforce or post-secondary education/training. BPDD strongly supports:

- Governor's proposal to end long-term care waiting lists for children with significant disabilities. Children's long-term supports help families raise their children with the most significant disabilities at home, provide needed therapy and equipment, and open opportunities for them to learn and grow outside school that can lead to their success later in life.
- Investment in the Governor's Better Bottom Line incentive grants that reward schools that are preparing students with disabilities for college and jobs.

BPDD includes additional recommendations on education funding and transportation solutions for people with developmental disabilities that are unaddressed in the proposed state budget.

Education

The Governor's proposed budget did not include any increases for special education funding, which has remained flat for almost ten years. Costs have increased over time while the state reimbursement rate has gone from a high of 66% in 1980 to a low of 26% in 2017.

BPDD recommends an increase in special education funding along with overall per-pupil spending to prepare our students with disabilities for college and careers. Poor educational preparation of students with disabilities translates into a lifetime of high unemployment, lower wages, and reliance on public benefit programs. A quality education prepares students with disabilities to move with their peers from school into employment within the community.

Transportation

Investment in innovative transportation options for people with disabilities is necessary to help people get where they need to go on their schedule.

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.

BPDD recommends investing in transportation pilot projects that explore creative solutions like on-demand transportation networks (Lyft/Uber), app-based taxicab systems (Flywheel), and community and volunteer ridesharing to expand transportation options and capacity for people with disabilities and other groups (older adults, low income adults) that face transportation barriers.

Home and Community Based Workforce Crises

In addition to reliable transportation, a stable home and community based workforce—including personal care, home health care, employment supports—in necessary to ensure people with disabilities can participate in the workforce. The Governor's proposed increase to Medicaid personal care rates not go far enough to address the direct care crisis Wisconsin is facing statewide, particularly in rural areas.

BPDD also notes that the home and community based workforce that helps keep people with disabilities in their homes and participating in their communities is not restricted to personal care workers. The proposed personal care rate increase does not raise wages for other home and community based workers whose wages are set by different Medicaid rates.

Impact of federal Medicaid changes on state budget and people with disabilities

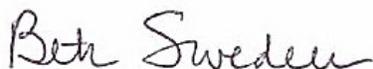
Since the passage of the 2015-17 state budget, Congress has proposed changes to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid that concern BPDD, people with disabilities, and their families. The proposed 25% (or almost \$900 billion) cut to Medicaid and proposed shift to a per capita cap and block grants Medicaid funding formula could put states in the position of restricting or eliminating needed services or denying access to health and long term care. This will jeopardize Wisconsin's investment in a robust Medicaid system that has led to cost savings for the state budget and has kept people out of expensive Medicaid-funded institutions, and have profound impacts on the lives of people with disabilities.

People with I/DD participate in all of Wisconsin's Medicaid funded programs. Many services, supports, and health care needed by people with disabilities are not available or are not available at the level needed on the private insurance market. Wisconsin's Medicaid programs make it possible for people with disabilities and older adults to live and work in the community instead of expensive nursing homes or institutions. Medicaid supports also make the difference between caregivers being able to keep their jobs or leaving the workforce—jeopardizing their own financial futures—to care for family members.

The positive impact of Wisconsin's high-quality Medicaid system in the lives of the people with disabilities who rely on it is almost incalculable, and it has also offered Wisconsin a huge return on investment. Wisconsin has already successfully used Medicaid waivers to flexibly design Medicaid programs tailored to the needs of our citizens. Given the achievements of Wisconsin in developing a strong Medicaid system, BPDD believes Congress will listen carefully to the input from state legislatures before proceeding.

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.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beth Swedeen".

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