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BPDD REACTION TO STATE OF THE STATE: HOPE FOR BI-PARTISAN ACTION ON ISSUES FACING DISABILITY COMMUNITY

(MADISON) – The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) supports Governor Tony Evers’ focus on investing in public education outlined in his State of the State address last night, including a \$600 million increase for special education services supporting students with disabilities: a landmark statement about supporting students with disabilities and equipping them for adult success.

“BPDD has heard from families around the state who have watched their children’s school supports erode, often despite the best efforts of school staff,” said Beth Swedeen, BPDD Executive Director. “This proposed increase speaks strongly about the importance of supporting students with disabilities to be equipped for college and career.”

BPDD also supports the Governor’s proposed health care reform package that includes Medicaid expansion, protections for pre-existing conditions, and increased mental health programs for children in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Swedeen said BPDD hopes that a transportation task force announced by the Governor last night will include representatives with expertise in disability, and that the group will examine the transportation needs that go beyond roads and bridges.

“Transportation is a top concern, with many people living with disability saying that lack of options prevents them from obtaining employment and independently participating in community life,” Swedeen said. “Statewide, transportation continues to be a top priority of people with disabilities and those caring for them, many of whom do not own reliable transportation. It’s time for innovative transportation solutions that can help all Wisconsinites go where they need to go when they need to get there.”

Not mentioned by either political party’s leadership last night was the alarming shortage of direct care workers in all parts of the state. BPDD sees increasing concerns where people cannot find and hire enough staff, resulting in serious health consequences and increased family stress.

“Both the lack of paid caregivers and the increasing stress and lack of support for unpaid caregivers has reached a crisis point,” Swedeen said. “People are making very difficult choices about where they can live. Families are giving up employment and compromising their own health. And the situation is only projected to become more dire in the immediate future.”

Swedeen said BPDD and other disability groups also had hoped to hear an intent to end the wait

list for children's long-term supports. While the last state budget addressed the wait list, an additional 1100 children are now waiting for supports.

Swedeen said BPDD looks forward to working with both the Governor and the Legislature in the months ahead to address the most pressing issues facing people with disabilities statewide and their families.

The Board for People with Developmental Disabilities is comprised of Governor-appointed representatives statewide living with developmental disabilities and family members who support a loved one with disabilities. It is federally funded to advise the state's policymakers, advocating for policies and practices leading to the independence and inclusion of people with disabilities in their communities.