



March 18, 2019

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

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:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) has completed its initial analysis of Governor Evers' proposed budget. We wish to bring several proposals to the attention of the committee that we believe will benefit people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and their families.

BPDD appreciates the work this committee has done in previous budgets to improve the lives of people with I/DD and is looking forward to working with members throughout the 2019-21 budget process as you deliberate and consider the Governor's proposals and any adjustments.

## Education

BPDD supports the proposal to increase state **special education reimbursement** to local school districts from 24% to 60%. The reimbursement rate has not been increased in ten years; this funding follows through on the state's commitment to local school districts to cover education for students with disabilities.

BPDD supports Governor Evers' proposal to increase funding for **special education transition incentive and transition readiness grants**. These two important grant programs were established in the last biennial budget under Governor Walker and reward local school districts working to provide quality transition services to prepare students with disabilities for community employment and living independently.

## Employment

BPDD supports Rep. Edming's proposal for \$6.75 million to create a one-time appropriation within the 2019-21 budget to **transition long-term care employment service providers to community integrated employment** business models. This funding would be administered as a competitive grant process to come into compliance with federal requirements and report on measurable outcome criteria. We look forward to working with the committee to advance this initiative.

## Transportation

BPDD supports the proposed investments in **public transit** including capital improvements, **specialized transportation**, and **paratransit**.

Unfortunately, the Governor's budget does not meaningfully address the lack of public transportation capacity that is experienced in many parts of the state. It also does not invest in **regional transportation solutions** that enable non-driving populations—including low income workers without cars, aging adults, and people with disabilities—to move across jurisdictional boundaries to destinations such as health care centers, state agency or county service centers, better paying jobs, and area locations critical to routine business and daily living. BPDD is working with a legislative office to craft a proposal for a pilot program to incentivize regional approaches to transportation.

## Caregiver Crisis

BPDD supports the increase to the **Family Care direct care** and **personal care services rates** that build upon the initial investments included in the 2017-19 state budget.

In the last biennial budget, the Wisconsin legislature included \$60.8 million to fund increases for the direct care portion of managed long-term care capitation rates. This increase only applied to a subset of workers in Family Care. A similar recognition of the need to correct for the increasing costs of labor and difficulty in recruiting and retaining direct care workers was not recognized in the **IRIS program** which supports approximately 18,000 people.

Individual IRIS participant budgets are calculated using a similar formula to the Family Care capitation rate, using a formula derived from average service cost estimates. To achieve equity between Family Care and IRIS and to ensure that people who choose IRIS have the same funding support to recruit and retain high quality workers, there should be an equivalent IRIS Direct Care Funding Initiative coordinated by DHS and directed to participant's IRIS budgets to meet their direct care needs. BPDD looks forward to working with the committee to correct this oversight.

BPDD recognizes that small increases to already low wages are not enough to address the caregiver crisis. Lack of benefits—including health insurance, paid sick and family leave, retirement, dependent care, commuter benefits etc.—career advancement opportunities, training, and support are all factors that impact the recruitment and retention of quality caregivers. With the recent creation of a Caregiver Task Force, BPDD anticipates that advocates and the legislature will be able to develop and advance a comprehensive package to better address the caregiver crisis.

## Medicaid

BPDD supports funding the **Children's Long-Term Support waiver program**, so that no child with a disability is left waiting for needed supports and services. BPDD recommends changing the appropriation line from "Continuing" to "Sum-Sufficient" to guarantee a permanent end to waiting lists.

Adding funding to the Birth to 3 program for children suffering from lead exposure is a worthwhile investment to address a preventable cause of I/DD.

BPDD appreciates the proposed investments to improve access to **dental care** for people in Medicaid. Access to regular dental care is a big problem for people with I/DD; 29% of adults with disabilities have had at least one permanent tooth removed over the past year. Increases in Medicaid rates and funding specifically directed to dentists serving people with I/DD will help expand the pool of dentists available for Medicaid beneficiaries.

The additional staff requested for the **Division of Quality Assurance** are necessary to provide proper oversight of quality improvements within Wisconsin's Medicaid programs and provide necessary review of assisted living facilities, including Adult Family Homes and Community Based Residential Facilities.

BPDD encourages the legislature to re-examine its intent and include provisions that **exempt disability waiver programs**—including Family Care, IRIS, PACE/Partnership, Children's Long-Term Care, and the Medical Assistance Purchase Plan—from the legislative process requirements that are required for waiver reauthorizations and state plan amendments. These programs are well established; advocates are concerned that additional legislative process will make it more difficult and time consuming to make technical changes, adjust programs to make them more responsive to state needs, make improvements to programs, and make sure they follow federal requirements that are often tied to increased funding for states for routine waiver renewals.

BPDD believes that raising the income threshold for **Badgercare eligibility** from 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 138% FPL will help some people with I/DD and caregivers. Populations of people with disabilities in Badgercare include: people with I/DD who do not meet nursing home level of care to qualify for a long-term care program, people with disabilities who are waiting (sometimes up to three years) for a disability determination, people with chronic or intermittent health conditions, and people with a primary diagnosis of mental health.

An estimated 30% of Wisconsin's paid caregiving workforce is already in Badgercare, as are many family caregivers who have had to reduce hours or leave the workforce to take care of aging adults and people with disabilities. Many of these workers are limiting the hours they work in order to keep access to their health care; increasing the income threshold will help these workers increase hours and boost caregiving capacity. Similarly, extending health care coverage to more low-income caregivers may assist with caregiver retention.

## **Mental Health**

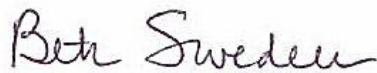
BPDD is generally supportive of the mental health proposals included in the Governor's budget. Many people with I/DD have co-occurring mental health conditions

## Voting

BPDD believes automatic voter registration will help address some of the challenges that many voters with disabilities and older adults experience.

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 black ink that reads "Beth Swedeen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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