

# Disability Rights Wisconsin: Notes positive budget investments for people with disabilities

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Madison, WI- Wisconsin's Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities is encouraged by the investment in people with disabilities demonstrated in the 2017-2019 Biennial Budget. "The Governor and Legislature have shown a commitment for people with disabilities across the lifespan in the current budget," stated Daniel Idzikowski, Executive Director. "DRW supports these investments in the lives of people with disabilities and their families but also realizes we still have much work to do, particularly in terms of providing people with disabilities adequate funding for special education and to ensure access to transportation to lead full lives in their communities."

DRW is pleased to see the following items in the 2017-2019 Biennial Budget:

- Wisconsin's commitment to community-based Medicaid programs that are vital to the independence of Wisconsinites with disabilities. DRW is particularly pleased by the addition of \$39 million towards the elimination of wait lists for 2200 children with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, or emotional disturbances who need long term supports and the continued commitment to expand Family Care and IRIS across the state.
- Ombudsman services for participants who are aged 60 or older who self-direct their services in the IRIS program.

- Positive investments to support inmates with mental health needs, including expansion of the Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS) program.
- A 2% increase to support the personal care program direct care workforce caring for people with disabilities across the state, although a larger increase is needed to address the workforce shortage in Wisconsin.
- Increased mental health funding for adults and children, which includes funding for a children's crisis treatment and stabilization facility, a peer run respite center for Veterans, and the Child Psychiatry Consultation program. We thank Governor Walker for restoring full funding for these initiatives.
- The elimination of the "premium cliff" and the expanded income and asset eligibility under the Medical Assistance Purchase Program (MAPP) program and an increase in the Elderly, Blind, and Disabled (EBD) medically needy income limit for Medicaid.
- An expansion of access to mental health services for school age children, training in trauma-informed care for personnel working with students, and programs to help youth with disabilities obtain competitive employment. However, funding for special education once again remains flat.
- The protection of due process rights by retaining the Labor and Industry Review Commission, which reviews disability related employment discrimination claims.
- The provision of \$1 million in TANF funding for civil legal services.

While these are all positive steps toward an inclusive environment for people with disabilities, DRW has concerns that other provisions or omissions may impede this progress, including:

- The expansion of the Special Needs Scholarship Program without extending federal civil rights protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to students who participate. Under the revisions passed in the budget, private voucher schools could access more funding from school districts and GPR up to 90% of the total cost of a student's programming while special education categorical aid in public schools has remained flat for almost a decade at a reimbursement rate of 26%.
- The elimination of the Governor's proposed additional DHS positions to effectively implement the changes to the MAPP program.
- The failure to address a significant investment in all types of public transit or other transportation solutions, given that so many people with disabilities do not drive or own a car, beyond the appreciated 2% increase for paratransit services.

DRW will continue to strongly support more funding for special education in public schools and new solutions for transportation for people with disabilities so they may fully participate in our workforce and community life. Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin.