

Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities: State budget offers mixed bag for people with disabilities

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The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) applauds the increased funding for the Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) program which will eliminate the waiting list for 2,200 children with disabilities and their families to access critical long-term care services and supports. 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.

BPDD is pleased that the legislature has approved improvements to the Medicaid Work Incentive program (MAPP) as part of the 2017-19 state budget. The budget makes needed changes to establish a fair premium structure that incentivizes participants to work in community jobs to their full potential, ensures savings workers have accumulated are retained after retirement, and ensures people who lose their jobs are put back on the path to employment.

While the modest rate increase for personal care workers is appreciated, Wisconsin's investment in the community based workforce continues to be dramatically underfunded. Moreover, the personal care rate increase does not raise wages for other home and community based workers—such as home health workers and employment support workers—whose wages are set by different Medicaid rates and who also help keep people with disabilities in their homes and

participating in their communities.

“The entire home and community based workforce keeps people in their homes, jobs, and communities, maximizes people’s independence, and lowers overall Medicaid spending by keeping people out of expensive institutions,” said Beth Swedeen, BPDD Executive Director. “Without an adequate community workforce BPDD is concerned people with disabilities may be forced into expensive institutional settings, reversing the progress Wisconsin has made the past 25 years through the expansion of Family Care and IRIS.”

The modest increase in paratransit funding is appreciated, but does not deliver the bold transportation reform needed for people with disabilities to fully access and participate in the workforce and their communities. Increased funding for transit and piloting of innovative transportation solutions like ride-sharing are desperately needed.

“Reliable transportation and a stable home and community based workforce—including personal care, home health care, and employment supports—is necessary to ensure people with disabilities can participate in Wisconsin’s workforce,” said Beth Swedeen, BPDD Executive Director.

BPDD is disappointed that the budget was amended to include an open door and unlimited funding for the special needs voucher program before it has proven to be successful for students with disabilities, and urges the Governor to veto this provision.

The Joint Finance Committee increased high cost special education categorical aide to a 90% reimbursement rate but failed to provide any increases in overall special education categorical aid which has remained flat for 10 years. The increase in overall funding for schools including specific funding for students with disabilities, mental health grants, and transition related grants to move more students with disabilities to community employment is positive.

“BPDD strongly supports increases in education funding so that children with disabilities can access their neighborhood schools alongside their peers and receive the same high-quality education and supports and services that will enable them to succeed in college and careers throughout their lives,” said Beth Swedeen, Executive Director of BPDD.