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Disability Rights Wisconsin: Celebrates Governor's announcement on caregiving task force

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Disability Rights Wisconsin attended Governor Evers' signing of an Executive Order to form a Caregiving Task Force to on strengthening the direct care workforce and supporting families providing care for their loved ones. The Task Force will study caregiver recruitment and retention, compensation and benefits, access to healthcare, and provider registries.
Wisconsin has been a leader in developing innovative ways to support people of all ages with disabilities in the community. Lea Kitz, Executive Director said, "The potential of these programs to support community living is at risk because of a shortage of direct care professionals."

The need for direct care workers is projected to increase by an additional 20,000 workers by 2026. Nationally, unpaid caregivers provide more than $470 billion per year in unpaid direct care for their family members. As participants in the Governor's transition team on healthcare, DRW recommended that the administration prioritize the direct care workforce crisis by addressing low wages and lack of benefits.

"We suggested several initiatives including hourly wage increases and a Medicaid buy-in option for direct care workers. These would be a good start to building a caregiver workforce which we hope will be part of any recommendations of the Task Force," said Barbara Beckert.

The Task Force will bring together key stakeholders including people who receive services, family caregivers, direct care providers, and advocates. Importantly, collaboration and technical assistance between state departments to accomplish this important work are built into its structure. In 2016, Wisconsin Survival Coalition conducted a statewide survey of more than 500 people who rely on direct care services and their families and found that 95% had trouble finding workers, 85% did not have enough workers to cover all their shifts, 43% couldn't find a worker seven or more times per month, and 60% said they get sick more often when they do not have enough staff.

DRW Advisory Council Member Jessica Nell said, "I recently had to stop working due to lack of caregivers to help support me in my home on a daily basis. I had my dream job supporting other people with disabilities, but inconsistent care left me no option but to resign."

DRW looks forward to working with the Governor to consider steps that will impact this serious situation.