

# Wisconsin BPDD Living Well Project: Applauds Senate for protecting people with disabilities

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The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities-Living Well project is grateful to the Wisconsin Senate for passing SB395 today. We especially thank Senator Jacque for his leadership on this bill even during his recovery period.

Wisconsin is one of eight states to receive a five-year federal grant to improve community monitoring and prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Disability advocates—including the Waisman Center, Disability Rights Wisconsin, and The Arc Wisconsin—are working with Wisconsin Long-Term Care organizations, service providers, and the state to prevent abuse and neglect while also improving the response.

Incidents of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disabilities are often unseen, unreported, and unaddressed. In 2020, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services reported 52% of abuse or neglect cases involved people with intellectual, developmental, or physical disabilities. Nationally, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are up to 7 times more likely than people without disabilities to be victims of abuse.

“During the last year, the Wisconsin Living Well team learned there was inequity in the statutes that require investigation of claims of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation for people with disabilities age 18-59 compared to people over 60.” said Sally Flaschberger, Project Manager for the Living Well project, “This bill makes a simple change to the statute to treat both vulnerable populations equally in the statutes and in turn provide greater protections for people with disabilities in Wisconsin.”

Families and other caregivers report difficulty accessing the system when reporting abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Sandra Lomeli, parent to a young woman with a disability, testified at the hearing, “Agencies like Adult Protective Services were created to help a person like my daughter. When harm happens, they are supposed to help. They should not be given an option. If a person calls reporting abuse, an investigation **MUST** be conducted for the sake of the individual at risk, as well as for the safety of the community.”

In the last seven years, reports of abuse and neglect for people with disabilities has increased 38% with no increases in funding for County Adult Protective Service agencies. While significant investments in the current APS system are greatly needed, the changes passed today are a first step to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are assured the same response and investigation as older adults.