

Wisconsin BPDD: Assembly passes bi-partisan bills to improve financial independence and safety for people with disabilities

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(MADISON) — Today the State Assembly passed legislation to make sure reports of abuse and neglect are treated equally (SB395/AB 400) and to help people with disabilities earn and save more with ABLE accounts (SB158/AB 167).

SB395/AB 400 makes an important technical change to make sure all reports of abuse and neglect must receive the same level of initial investigation regardless of a person's age.

Current law requires investigation if the victim is age sixty or older (Elder at Risk) but allows discretion on whether to investigate if the victim is aged 18 to 59 (known as Adults at Risk).

“In the course of BPDD’s work we have heard many people with disabilities, family members, and concerned providers recount incidents of abuse and neglect of individuals. At times they have gone unaddressed by our systems,” said Beth Swedeen, BPDD Executive Director. “While more policy change are needed, this is a needed step to better respond to abuse and neglect of people with disabilities and create the same protections for people with disabilities that are already in place for older adults.”

SB158/AB 167 directs the Department of Financial Institutions to study establishing a Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) either directly or by entering into an agreement with another state or alliance of states.

In 2016, Wisconsin passed ABLE tax legislation but chose not to establish its own state ABLE program, instead allowing Wisconsinites to open accounts in other states.

“ABLE accounts can be an important tool for people with disabilities and families to earn and save without losing access to important health care and disability programs,” Swedeen said. “Many people with disabilities and families are unaware of ABLE accounts, or struggle to find information and make decisions about how to set them up. This bill will take concrete steps to make ABLE accounts more accessible for Wisconsin families.”

BPDD encourages Governor Evers to sign these important pieces of legislation into law as soon as possible.

BPDD was pleased to work with people with disabilities, family members, and other disability and aging advocates on these strongly bi-partisan pieces of legislation led by Sen. Jacque and Rep. Mursau (SB 158/AB167) and Sen. Jacque and Rep. Rozar (SB 395/AB 400).