

# Wisconsin BPDD: Governor Evers signs bill that protects people with disabilities

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(MADISON) — The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) thanks Governor Evers for signing a bill today that ensures investigation steps are taken by Adult Protective Services into each report of abuse or neglect for a person with a disability.

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, BPDD 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 BPDD’s Living Well federally-funded effort to improve the health and safety of people with disabilities using long-term care. “This law makes a simple change to the statute to treat both vulnerable populations equitably and in turn provide greater protection for people with disabilities in Wisconsin.”

Wisconsin is one of eight states to receive a five-year federal Living Well grant to improve monitoring and prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Disability organizations—led by BPDD and including the Waisman Center, Disability Rights Wisconsin, and The Arc Wisconsin—are working with Wisconsin’s Family Care/IRIS

programs, service providers, and the state to prevent abuse and neglect while also improving response to critical incident reports.

Families and other caregivers in Wisconsin report difficulty accessing the system when reporting abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Sandra Lomeli from Pewaukee, parent to a young woman with a disability who is a victim of abuse, said, "As part of our healing journey, we advocated for this positive change to help survivors with intellectual disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are one of the largest groups of sexual assault victims. However, their claims may be ignored or marginalized. We thank Governor Evers for signing this into law."

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