

GOP lawmakers touting bill to cover transportation costs for blind workers

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GOP lawmakers are touting a bill that would provide a transportation tax credit for blind employees as a way to boost Wisconsin's workforce.

Rep. David Steffen, R-Green Bay, and Sen. Rob Hutton, R-Brookfield, are currently circulating the bill for cosponsorship. In a memo sent to all state lawmakers, they note that about 70 percent of blind state residents are unemployed, referencing data from the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

They argue that access to affordable and reliable transportation is "often the greatest barrier to employment" for blind people.

"While folks who are legally blind possess the motivation, education and talents to professionally contribute to the workforce, they remain almost entirely untapped, often due to transportation barriers," they wrote in the memo. "This bill works to remove this obstacle to employment for people who are legally blind and will reduce our statewide workforce shortage by empowering this often ignored population."

The legislation would create a nonrefundable income tax credit to cover the cost of certain transportation services between the blind recipient's residence and workplace, according to an analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau. That can include mass transit, taxicabs or a transportation network company, as well as "paratransit" options offering non-fixed-route services, otherwise known as community transport.

The credit would equal 50 percent of the cost of those services for a taxable year, capped at \$1,500 for that period.

LRB notes claimants would not be able to claim a credit for amounts paid from an ABLE account if that person claimed a state individual income tax subtraction for

funds deposited into that account. ABLE accounts are tax-exempt savings accounts that can pay for certain expenses for those with disabilities, the memo shows.

The cosponsorship deadline for the bill is 5 p.m. Friday.

More than 100,000 people in Wisconsin report being blind or having “severe difficulty” seeing even with glasses, according to a CDC report. It also shows people with severe visual impairment are more likely to have other challenges such as arthritis and mobility issues.

See the memo:

<https://www.wisconsinlobbyists.com/resources/Co-Sponsorship%20Memos/8.4.2023/LRB-2105%20Transportation%20Tax%20Credit%20for%20Workers%20who%20are%20Legally%20Blind%20Memo.pdf>

See the CDC report here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/pdf/state-profile/wisconsin-508.pdf>

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