Sen. Jacque: Bill to empower the disabled unanimously clears Assembly committee

Posted on Thursday, May 25, 2023

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop](#).

MADISON, WI… Wisconsin's efforts to empower individuals with disabilities continued today as an Assembly panel unanimously passed legislation creating tax-exempt savings accounts that can help cover the cost of services that help those with physical and cognitive challenges live full, independent lives. The bill unanimously cleared a Senate committee earlier this year as well.

State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere), co-author of the proposal with State Rep. Jeff Mursau, said that Wisconsin is currently just one of four states that do not have their own Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) account program, although state residents may open accounts in other states.

"Growth of ABLE accounts in Wisconsin has been slow, perhaps because the state doesn't host a general webpage or have its own program to promote," Sen. Jacque said. "This bill should make these accounts more accessible and widely adopted by Wisconsin families who need them."

Under current federal law, states may establish ABLE programs, which allow individuals classified with having a disability before age 26 to have a tax-exempt savings account set up in their name to cover certain expenses, including: education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, and other services. Enrollment in this program does not affect eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid.

Sen. Jacque said that when Wisconsin passed tax-exempt ABLE account legislation in 2016, the state chose not to establish its own program, instead allowing

Wisconsinites to open accounts in other states. ABLE use in other states is estimated by financial planners to be significantly higher

"This legislation still allows Wisconsinites to take advantage of ABLE programs in other states," Sen. Jacque said. "But the goal of having a Wisconsin program is to hopefully expand participation so that more of our friends and neighbors can build supplemental savings to access programs that enable them to do the everyday things most of us take for granted."

Sen. Jacque said the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Account Participation Act (Assembly Bill 121) requires the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) to implement and administer a qualified ABLE program, either directly or by entering into an agreement with another state or alliance of states. The bill also requires DFI to publicize information about ABLE accounts on its website, including information about each state that currently offers ABLE accounts.

Sen. Jacque said he developed the proposal with the input of disability advocates and organizations, who have pushed to create a Wisconsin ABLE program during previous legislative sessions.

"This bill is a step in the right direction to help ease financial strains for disabled individuals, without putting their other benefits at risk, "Sen. Jacque said.