



DATE: July 24, 2017

TO: Co-Chairs Darling and Nygren and Joint Finance Committee Members  
 FROM: Wisconsin Aging and Disability Stakeholder Organizations

RE: Transportation Needs of Wisconsin's Aging and Disability Communities

We are writing to ask that the transportation funding plan being debated by the Joint Finance Committee address the specific transportation needs of Wisconsin's aging and disability communities.

Lack of adequate transportation options is consistently one of the top policy concerns of older adults and people with disabilities. Older adults and people with disabilities cannot go to school, work, attend worship services, run errands, go to the doctor or engage in social activities without transportation services.

Wisconsin is recognized for cutting- edge home- and community-based services as an alternative to higher-cost institutionalized care. Without transportation programs to support these services, people become trapped in their homes—leading to isolation and related health issues.

As legislative leaders debate the future of transportation funding in Wisconsin, the unique needs of people with disabilities and older adults must also be addressed.

Governor Walker's proposed 2017-19 state budget included inflationary increases for two programs that support the transportation needs of people with disabilities and older adults in counties and tribes—the 85.21 and 85.215 programs. It is critical that these items are added back to the budget. Stakeholders support the following funding levels:

- **A 3.75% increase to 85.21 Specialized Transportation Assistance to counties in each year of the budget (\$527,288 and \$547,061 respectively).** There has been a 12% increase in the population eligible for 85.21 services, which means per capita spending has actually decreased by 7% since 2009. Providing access allows older adults and people with disabilities to remain in less expensive living arrangements, receive non-emergent care and remain contributing members of the community.

- **A \$148,000 increase to the 85.215 program Tribal Transportation funding in each year of the budget.** The Tribal Elderly Transportation Assistance Program provides the 11 federally recognized Tribes of Wisconsin with financial assistance to provide transportation service to tribal elders both on and off the reservation. According to the Department of Transportation, “5 of the 11 federally recognized tribes in Wisconsin do not have access to any form of public transportation and rely on this program as the sole source of funding for tribal elderly transportation.”

In addition to the items above, the following ideas have the support of several aging and disability advocacy groups across the state:

- **Change the transit allocation to a continuing appropriation.** Under current law, when savings are realized by transit systems because of prudent planning and cost savings, at the end of the biennium those savings are lapsed back into the Transportation Fund - penalizing transit providers for efficiency. According to the Department of Transportation’s 2017-19 agency budget request, between 2011 and 2015, an “average of \$971,000 has lapsed from the state Mass Transit Operating Assistance program to the Transportation Fund.”
- **Support for Transit and Paratransit.** According to the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau Paper #606, state transit aid is \$4,821,700 below the 2011 funding level. According to LFB, the DOT has indicated that this funding shortfall has led to “transit service reductions, fare increases for many systems, and a decline in overall statewide ridership.” Any transportation funding plan must protect transit and paratransit funding from further reductions.
- **Create a Transportation Coordination Taskforce.** Transportation services impact the success of other state initiatives whether they are in workforce development, home and community services for older adults and people with disabilities, or economic development. To most effectively leverage private and public transportation resources and to respond to cutting edge technology the creation of a taskforce could identify transportation solutions across agency programs.

Sincerely,

AARP Wisconsin

Access to Independence

Blinded Veterans Association of Wisconsin

Disability Rights Wisconsin

Greater WI Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.

IndependenceFirst

Marquette County DHS-Aging Services

Midstate Independent Living Consultants

Milwaukee County Department on Aging

National Association of Blind Veterans Wisconsin Chapter

Northeastern Wisconsin Regional Access to Transportation  
Committee (NEWRAT)

Options for Independent Living

Save IRIS

Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

The Arc Wisconsin

Wheels of Independence, Inc.

Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network

Wisconsin Association of Mobility Managers

Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental  
Disabilities

Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers

Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

Wisconsin Long Term Care Coalition

Wisconsin Public Transportation Association

CC: Governor Walker  
Assembly Speaker Robin Vos  
Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald  
Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca  
Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling