



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Survival Coalition Concerned About Unintended Consequences of Public Assistance Changes Approved by Assembly

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations reacted to the State Assembly's passage of special session welfare reform proposals by reminding legislators that people with disabilities rely on key public assistance programs to live their daily lives; even minor changes can have major unintended consequences.

"We are disappointed that common-sense changes suggested by the disability community to develop a stakeholder advisory council and create consistent exemptions were not included in the bills approved by the Assembly on Thursday," said Survival Coalition Co-Chair Beth Swedeen.

Survival Coalition asked lawmakers to develop a formal stakeholder advisory council so that program participants could shape the implementation of these new requirements and prevent unintended consequences. The Coalition also raised concerns about the lack of consistent exemption language across the proposals, which would result in different exemptions for different programs. People with disabilities may fall through the cracks in attempting to comply with numerous and varying requirements, losing access to needed benefits.

"Major program reforms need to be developed with stakeholders. We are disappointed that an amendment proposing the creation of a stakeholder advisory council was rejected in a Committee vote on Wednesday," said Survival Coalition Co-Chair Lisa Pugh.

People with disabilities in Wisconsin are disproportionately poor – with working age individuals with disabilities experiencing a poverty rate of 25.2% compared to 9.1% for those without disabilities. As a result, many rely on programs like FoodShare, Medicaid and public housing.

While Survival Coalition supports new exemption language adopted on the Assembly floor to make sure that people caring for dependent children with disabilities won't have to meet FoodShare work requirements, advocates remain concerned that there are not consistent exemptions across all bills.

"We would like to see clear exemptions for individuals who are providing care to family members, or who are enrolled in a drug treatment program or experiencing other challenges related to a disability that make it difficult to work," said Survival Co-Chair Maureen Ryan.

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