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Disability Rights Wisconsin Applauds Positive Budget Initiatives for People with Disabilities

Disability Rights Wisconsin, Wisconsin's Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, is encouraged by the comprehensive initiatives for people with disabilities in Governor Evers' 2019-2021 Biennial Budget Proposal. "The Governor's budget shows a strong commitment to people with disabilities," stated Lea Kitz, Executive Director. "Governor Evers and Lieutenant Governor Barnes listened to people with disabilities and their families around the state and included many recommendations to enhance their lives by providing better education, supports and services, transportation, and medical and mental health care."

The Governor's Budget includes many positive provisions that will touch the lives of people with disabilities. DRW is encouraged to see the following included:

- A \$600 million increase for special education aid to a 60% reimbursement by the end of the biennium, over \$63 million for continued expansion of access to mental health services for school age children, pupil services staff, and training, and \$7 million for programs to help youth with disabilities obtain competitive employment.
- A commitment to Medicaid expansion which could cover an additional 82,000 Wisconsinites, including many people with disabilities. By leveraging federal funds for Medicaid expansion, savings may be used to end waiting lists for children with disabilities and other vital services.
- Funding for all eligible children with disabilities for the Children's Long-Term Support Program, and \$2.1 million to provide navigators, benefits specialists, and ombudsmen to support families to access services and long term supports for their children.
- Increasing the accountability of schools participating in special needs scholarship program including increasing protections for students with disabilities.
- Addressing the lead crisis and the effect on children by expanding birth to three to include more children affected by lead poisoning.
- Returning 17-year-olds from adult court back to juvenile court with more options to address mental health, educational and other programming needs of youth, including \$5 million to assist counties with programming.
- Additional funding to continue the move to smaller, more community-based facilities with evidence-based programs for youth, allowing the closing of Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake.
- \$69 million investments for non-institutional mental health, behavioral health and psychiatrist services, including covering the state's share for mental health crisis services, rather than having counties fund this.
- Increased funding for caregivers: \$14.8 million each year for direct care and services provided in long-term care by managed care organizations, \$16.7 million for rate increases for personal care direct care services; and 1.5 percent increase for direct care workforce in nursing homes.
- \$4 million to expand Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS) program statewide.
- \$6 million in Elderly and Disabled transportation aids and \$22 million in increases to transit systems around that state which are imperative to the independence of people with disabilities.

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- Investments in dental care, including \$5 million to reimburse dental providers who serve Medicaid recipients with both physical and mental disabilities.
- Funding to advance the recommendations of the Interagency Council on Homelessness to help increase the State's investment in the 21,000 people experiencing homelessness. A high percentage are people struggling with mental illness.
- Investment at Winnebago Mental Health to address staffing concerns and create a safer environment for patients.
- Repeal of the childless adult demonstration project which included work requirement, health risk assessments, and premiums, which will impede access by people with disabilities, particularly those with mental illness.

DRW regrets the deletion of statutory language that directs the DHS to implement Regional Long Term Care Advisory Committees. The fact that the DHS has never complied with this directive is not sufficient reason to eliminate the one remaining tool that recipients of Family Care and ADRC services have to identify gaps and problems and participate in improvements to the regional and statewide systems that have replaced local county long term support systems.

Wisconsin has a long tradition of bipartisan support for disability services. "We look forward to working with legislators to move forward these positive initiatives for Wisconsinites with disabilities," said Kristin Kerschensteiner, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services."

DRW is partnering with the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and The Arc Wisconsin to provide State Budget Trainings for the Disability Community around the state. Details will be posted on our website at www.disabilityrightswi.org/

Our current legislative and budget priorities can be found here: www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Budget_Priorities_0818-ACC.pdf

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Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping individuals free from abuse and neglect.