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### **The Arc Wisconsin Reacts to Governor's Budget: Will Work for Bi-Partisan Support**

Tens of thousands of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families across Wisconsin have a lot to celebrate and advocate for in Governor Evers' budget in coming months. On Thursday evening Governor Evers announced his support and proposed funding for various critical initiatives that disability advocates have been hoping for.

"The recognition of the need to better support children with significant disabilities is important to many families in every county," says Lisa Pugh, Executive Director. "The Governor's plan will ensure that more than 1000 children and their families do not have to wait for the things they need and once and for all, this waiting list for critical supports will be ended."

Families are also applauding the historic reinvestment in special education funding. Wisconsin public schools educate 858,800 students; approximately 14% of those children have disabilities and qualify for special education services. Schools have not seen an increase in special education funding in more than a decade.

"We have had to fight for a quality education for our son," says Lexy Austin of Verona, mom to 15-year-old Mac who has Down syndrome. "We want Mac to be able to learn alongside his peers in a regular, inclusive classroom. Schools desperately need funding for training and staff to make that happen."

The Governor's budget recognizes the direct care workforce crisis in several ways, including an expansion of Family Medical Leave policies to ensure more people can keep their jobs and take time off for care. The commitment to Medicaid expansion will cover an additional 82,000 Wisconsinites, including many caregivers who currently cannot afford health insurance. The budget also increases funding by \$29 million for the direct care workforce in the Family Care program.

While the budget does include a modest increase in the personal care rates to support workers who go into people's homes to provide supports with things like bathing, dressing and meals, disability advocates had hoped for more.

"We are in a crisis. People with disabilities cannot find workers and family caregivers are shouldering all the care without a break," says Pugh. "We are hopeful that the Governor's recent announcement of a Governor's Task Force on Caregiving will offer sustainable solutions and funding that ensure people can find qualified help and remain living in their homes and communities."

Other budget proposal items The Arc Wisconsin supports include significant investments in public and specialized transportation, an effort to expand access to dental care, and an increase mental health supports that will greatly benefit people with disabilities.

The Arc Wisconsin recognizes that many important initiatives that will improve the lives of people with disabilities are proposed to be funded through savings from Medicaid expansion. We request that legislators find thoughtful bi-partisan solutions to ensure these important investments can be made.

*The Arc Wisconsin advocates for and serves people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), including Down syndrome, autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy and other diagnoses. The Arc Wisconsin has 15 local chapters and is connected to a network of more than 650 chapters across the country promoting and protecting the human rights of people with I/DD and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes and without regard to diagnosis.*

**Editor's Note: The Arc is not an acronym; always refer to us as The Arc, not The ARC and never ARC. The Arc should be considered as a title or a phrase.**