



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Disability Advocates Assess the State Budget**

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations expressed both appreciation and concern today, after analyzing the initial budget decisions of the state legislature. According to Lynn Breedlove of Disability Rights Wisconsin, “We gained some ground in the Children’s Long Term Support Program and the timetable for Family Care expansion in Milwaukee, but we had some big setbacks as well.”

Positive developments for people with disabilities in the budget so far include:

- Funding services for 500 children, the first step toward the governor’s goal of serving 1000 new children with disabilities in the Children’s Long Term Support Program over the next 4 years;
- Allowing Milwaukee County to serve over 200 adults with disabilities in its first year of Family Care, rather than facing a one year delay;
- Adoption of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative recommendations for reform in the correctional system, the creation of a “Community Reintegration Program” for inmates with serious mental illness, and the prohibition on guards delivering medications in state

prisons;

- Expanding insurance coverage to include in-home treatment for children with autism;
- Clarifying the property tax exemption for low-income housing; and
- Restoring the proposed elimination of the Respite Care Grant Program and the Guardianship Grant Program.

Shel Gross of Mental Health America of Wisconsin echoed these mixed feelings. “The legislature approved a new program to enable counties to get federal match funds for mental health services, provided some new funds for community-based mental health services and reduced barriers to access to social workers. But the overall reduction in state funding for counties, including a new requirement for counties to pay the ‘state share’ of admissions of youth and older adults at the state mental health institutes, will inevitably hurt the community mental health system.”

Other major setbacks for people with disabilities include:

- A 3.1% cut in General School Aids, the lack of a funding increase to keep pace with the increased cost of special education, and limiting school districts to a \$200/pupil reserve cap increase;
- A \$19 million cut in Community Aids, an important revenue for county human service systems;
- A failure to cover the increased costs of Aging and Disability Resource Centers;
- An “unspecified” set of cuts to the Medicaid program in excess of \$250 million, to be determined by the Department of Health Services, during a recession when many more people are Medicaid-eligible; and
- A 56% reduction in state funding for independent living centers;

Maureen Ryan of the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers added, “Though it is disappointing that state funding for independent living centers was cut, we are glad that our base funding will be restored at the end of the biennium.”

When the budget reaches the Assembly and the Senate, there are still opportunities to improve it. Disability advocates strongly urge the legislature to a) exercise more legislative oversight and obtain more public input on the “unspecified” cuts to Medicaid, b) refine the approach for charging counties for patients in the Mental Health Institutes to avoid penalizing the counties that are not over-using the Institutes, and c) improve the school funding situation.

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