



## **WAITING IN WISCONSIN**

August 2003 A bulletin about the disability waiting list in Wisconsin written by Gerry Born  
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### **GOVERNOR ACTS ON THE BUDGET**

On July 24, 2003 Governor Doyle made his partial vetoes official and signed the 2003-05 Wisconsin State Budget into law. The governor vetoed 131 items and \$315 million from the budget. Other basic facts about this budget are as follows:

- Total budget in state funds is \$10.7 billion in FY2004 and \$11.7 billion in FY2005;
- Total spending is \$24 billion in FY2004 and \$24.6 billion in FY2005;
- State funding decreases by 2.4% in FY2004 and increases by 9.2% in FY2005;
- State staff positions are reduced by 2300;
- Transferred \$145 million in savings from the highway program to increase funds available if federal funds or revenue collections are less than projected in the budget;
- Special education funding is increased by more than \$5.8 million over the biennium;
- The governor projects the general fund balance to be \$205 million.

### **HUMAN SERVICES MAINTAIN CURRENT FUNDING**

While consumers, providers, advocates, and counties worked diligently to increase funding for various programs and services, there are very limited increases in this budget. At the same time in a budget that had to come up with \$3.2 billion to offset the deficit, it is a partial victory that human services and Medicaid long term care funding was not generally reduced. The following are some of the items in the budget or vetoes that relate to human services:

- Levy limits (so called tax freeze) was vetoed. This allows local officials including county boards to make decisions about taxes and spending rather than an arbitrary cap set by the state.
- Vetoed the amount of the nursing home rate increase that did not come from the bed-tax. In other words vetoed state funds, General Purpose Revenue (GPR), that had been put into the budget to provide for nursing home rate increases.
- Vetoed the legislative review and the requirement that DHFS involve providers, advocates, managed care organizations and others in the SSI Managed Care initiative. The governor suggests that DHFS is working with these groups already.

- The budget provides \$325 per day for placements for the DD centers. The legislature made that rate effective in FY2004. The governor partially vetoed that so it is effective in FY2003 or immediately. This budget emphasizes a strong movement to funding community long-term care.
- The governor vetoed part of the language regarding the downsizing of Northern Center to restore flexibility of DHFS to transfer individuals and staff to other centers.

## ANALYSIS

Previous Waiting List Bulletins and DAWN Alerts have provided summaries of what was included in the budget as well as what is missing. All of this information will not be repeated here. Needless to say, people waiting for services and staff providing various services for people living in the community will have to wait longer for services or funds from the state for a reasonable wage. All the hopes that so many had for funds for increases in disability long-term care services did not materialize in this budget. While human services held its own, this is of little comfort for those without services or staff living below the poverty line.

There are some limited funds for the children's long-term care reform to move forward along with the ability to maintain some funding for children with autism. Other long-term care reforms begin in this budget, very good news. Not only is the downsizing of Northern Center included, but funding for all non-DD Center ICFs/MR, which are essentially DD nursing homes, and for people with a developmental disability in regular nursing homes is transferred to county human services. This allows counties to use these funds in the community. It is also more difficult to have a person with a developmental disability placed in an ICF/MR or nursing home. These are some of the initial policy changes to begin to reform Wisconsin's long-term care system.

For anyone who has ever played the game of chess, the term checkmate is understood. For those not familiar with the game, checkmate is when the other player can take the king with every move the king makes. In this case the person with the king in check loses. This would be the result of any tax freeze imposed on local county programs as it relates to people with disabilities. In this budget as with many that have been passed over the last 15 to 20 years, the state provides no increases for existing recipients of service or for those waiting and without services. The counties have kept the service system from completely collapsing by providing at least some small increases. If a tax freeze were imposed on local governments, counties would be totally unable to provide any increases to the service system. No state increases; no county increases; checkmate—possibly services cannot survive. The message of the impact of no state or local increases on people with disabilities and their families needs to get to all legislators.

Finally, with a very successful rally and with a strong advocacy effort, at least services were not cut in a very difficult budget. Because this budget uses one-time funds, there likely will be at least an \$800 million deficit going into the 2005-07 biennium. The People Can't Wait initiative must keep growing and building along with other advocacy efforts. These efforts have paid off; not with totally what is desired, but they have made an impact. Much more work needs to be done. **The effort needs to continue!**

**PEOPLE CAN'T WAIT ... SURVIVAL COALITION OF WISCONSIN DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS**

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