



## **WAITING IN WISCONSIN**

A bulletin about the disability waiting list in Wisconsin written by Gerry Born  
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### **BUDGET PASSES LEGISLATURE—VETOES NEXT**

This edition of Waiting will not provide an in-depth analysis of the budget passed by the full legislature since it is not that much different from the budget passed by the Joint Finance Committee as described in the last edition of Waiting. In addition it will not be approved by the Governor without many changes. Once the Governor provides his vetoes and signs the budget, a complete analysis will be provided.

### **TAXES AND EXPENDITURES IN WISCONSIN**

While awaiting the Governor's actions, this is a good time to discuss the tax picture in Wisconsin. It is also timely since the legislature placed restrictions on property tax increases by local governments. This is provided in an attempt to give readers facts on which to base future discussions with legislators and other government officials, most of whom appear to want to give only one side of the tax issues as they affect Wisconsin's citizens and quality of life.

First it must be noted that there are multiple methods and statistical ways to report tax rankings. In the year 1999-2000, Wisconsin ranked 8th in per capita tax amounts but 3rd in tax amounts per \$1000 of income. This is because Wisconsin's per capita income is lower than many other states. At the same time, Wisconsin ranks 15th in state and local **spending** on a per capita basis, but 20th in amounts per \$1000 of income. Wisconsin ranks 35th and 37th in federal revenue. As per a recent article by Matt Pommer of the Capital Times, when federal, state and local taxes are all included, Wisconsin ranks 17th highest in the nation in per person taxes and 19th in taxes based on personal income. What all this indicates is that Wisconsin is much closer to the middle of the states in total taxes when federal deductions are included. Wisconsin's spending is also closer to the middle than the top. In sales tax, Wisconsin is 26th among the states.

When government leaders want to give the excuse that funds for services for people with disabilities are not possible because of the tax and spend levels in Wisconsin, it would be prudent to point out some of these statistics.

At the same time Wisconsin's ranking in spending in various areas provides a picture of the state's priorities. While this data was collected as part of the 2000 census and is based on 1999 figures, the following is Wisconsin's ranking among the states in 1999:

Highways: 15th	Parks & Recreation: 19th	Aging and Disability: 21st *
Higher Education: 14th	Corrections: 15th	Public Health: 19th *
K-12: 7th	Police and Fire: 14th	Public Hospitals: 38th *

\* Spending for this area is below the national average.

Typically almost any conclusion can be drawn from statistics depending on what the reviewer is attempting to suggest. What the tax and spending data suggests as it relates to disability and aging services is that net taxes in Wisconsin are not as high as many legislators want people to believe. At the same time, spending for people with disabilities or other human services needs is not a high priority in this state, and the support for these types of services is actually declining. In 1991 Wisconsin was 11<sup>th</sup> among the states in spending for human services.

What this situation requires is that the People Can't Wait initiative can't reduce its advocacy, but it must be increased, and more local groups are needed to make the necessary impact on state government to improve this picture. Unfortunately in this budget, aging and disability services lose even more ground.

### **GOVERNOR CANNOT ADD FUNDS**

While the Governor has promised to veto \$100 million from the budget passed by the legislature, he cannot add any funds, which means no general increases for disability services. If additional federal funds are obtained, the legislature will consider adding these funds for additional services as originally proposed by the Governor, but this is far from a certainty. Unless these additional federal funds come through, there are no funds to address current community services cost increases, people on waiting lists, Family Care expansion, etc. For the next two years counties and providers will continue to be left to figure out how to keep the current services operating, and people with disabilities and families are left to struggle in many instances with little or no assistance through a county program.

As soon as the Governor acts on the budget, Waiting will provide a summary of key actions with an analysis. This should be available about the end of July.

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