

SAMPLE OP-ED

March 27, 2001 Guest Editorial

People Can't Wait

This April marks the 20th Anniversary of the Community Options Program, or COP as it is affectionately known throughout our state. COP is the best known of a series of social programs that have earned Wisconsin a worldwide reputation as a leader in creating communities in which elders and people with disabilities can receive the support they need to live, to work, to be part of the everyday richness of life in Wisconsin. This month we should celebrate with pride the accomplishments of COP, of the Community Integration Program, of Family Support, of Community Support, of Birth to Three services to children, and of the many other social reforms for which Wisconsin citizens are justifiably proud.

April is also a month in which our Legislature begins deliberating over the Governor's proposed budget for the coming biennium. This is a grim budget indeed for people with disabilities, their families, and those who work to support them within our communities. While more than 270 million dollars is proposed for long term care rate increases for institutions, virtually no increases in funding are suggested for people with long term care needs who live in Wisconsin's communities.

The continued lack of state support for Wisconsin's world-renown community long term support system has created a growing crisis. Infants and children with disabilities and their families are now going without the support they need. Youth with disabilities are graduating from high school and sitting at home waiting for the support that would enable them to have a job, an income, to join the ranks of complaining taxpayers. Adults with physical disabilities are unable to obtain the personal support they need to live at home and to work. Throughout Wisconsin, waiting lists are growing for needed services and support.

Many young people with disabilities are living in nursing homes and other institutional settings or are increasingly fearful they may soon have to enter such settings. Older adults with disabilities are living at home with elderly parents, who themselves may need support in the near future. And the workers we rely upon to provide the professional and personal care our elders and people with disabilities rely upon each day remain inadequately compensated compared to staff who do identical work in our nursing homes. As a recent visitor of Wisconsin's long term care system commented, "You do so much so well --- why do you do so little of it compared to what your people need?"

That is a question for all of us to ask our Governor, our Legislators, our state officials in the coming weeks. Let us not forget the thousands of people with disabilities and elders in Wisconsin who are desperately in need of our support to simply live in our families, our neighborhoods, and our communities. Many of those individuals will be coming to our State Capitol at noon on April 25 for the People Can't Wait rally, a gathering aimed at strengthening our communities and ending our waiting lists. We encourage citizens from throughout our state to join them.

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SURVIVAL COALITION OF WISCONSIN DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

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