

PRESS RELEASE
STANDARD TEMPLATE
DRW letterhead
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DISABILITY RIGHTS WISCONSIN LAUNCHES FAMILY CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

Wisconsin's award-winning non-profit disability advocacy organization, Disability Rights Wisconsin today announced the expansion of their advocacy for adults age 18-59 in Wisconsin's long-term care programs, "Family Care" and "Family Care Partnership." Created in 1998, Family Care was designed to be a consumer-centered program for the delivery of long term care services for the elderly and people with developmental or physical disabilities. The Family Care Partnership program combines acute care and long-term care benefits.

"We welcome the opportunity to serve as the Family Care Ombudsman for adults with disabilities in Wisconsin's pilot counties," said Lynn Breedlove, Executive Director of Disability Rights Wisconsin. "It's critically important that consumers understand their rights in these growing programs." Breedlove says that since Family Care's inception, his agency has received requests for assistance from consumers in the program throughout the pilot counties. **"Individuals have a right to be involved in selecting where they want to live, the amount of services and the providers they want.** We're looking forward to expanding our advocacy to help consumers assert their rights in these programs as the state continues to expand towards its goal of statewide implementation."

"We have a large range of advocacy tools," said Breedlove. He explained that the new program will enable staff in DRW's Madison, Milwaukee and Rice Lake offices to expand information and education on consumer rights in the programs, assist with negotiating services, investigate complaints, resolve and mediate issues, appeal denials of services or changes in services and work with enforcement and regulatory agencies.

"It's important that consumers have well-trained advocates to assist them during these early years of Family Care's development," said Breedlove. He said DRW has consistently received requests for assistance from consumers already in the program, with concerns about quality and quantity of services, denials, terminations, changes in plans and other problems. "We're eager to continue working with the state and responsible local agencies to help make the goals of Family Care a reality," he said.

The Family Care Ombudsman Program has advocates in **DRW's Milwaukee and Madison's offices** and is available to advocate for Family Care participants in *any* Wisconsin Family Care county. It can help Family Care enrollees, their guardians and families with Family Care issues such as:

- Consumer choice and involvement in quality and quantity of services
- Inappropriate or inadequate notice before a reduction in services
- Access to meaningful, fairly paid, integrated setting employment
- Choice of living arrangement
- Access to Family Care and Partnership services for young adults transitioning from the school system

DRW is now accepting requests for services. If you have clients age 18-59 who qualify for or are enrolled in the Family Care or Partnership Programs and have a question or concern, contact the Family Care Ombudsman Program at the Disability Rights office nearest to you. Disability Rights Wisconsin provides reasonable accommodations upon request. Language translation services are available.

Madison: 608-267-0214; Toll-free: 800-928-8778*

Milwaukee: 414-773-4646; Toll-free: 800-708-3034*

Rice Lake: 715-736-1232; Toll-free: 877-338-3724*

TTY for all offices: 888-758-6049

*For consumers with disabilities and their families.

Disability Rights Wisconsin is a private non-profit organization. Founded in 1977, it was designated by the Governor to ensure the rights of all state citizens with disabilities through individual advocacy and systems change. DRW is part of a national system of federally-mandated independent disability agencies. It serves people of all ages, including people with developmental disabilities, people with mental illness, people with physical or sensory disabilities, and people with traumatic brain injury. DRW respects the cultural values and personal choices of those seeking our services.