

February 23, 2012

Dear Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly;

The X undersigned organizations representing the interests of the citizens of Northeast Wisconsin write to strongly advise that the Assembly move quickly to pass the same bill as the Senate – SB 380, without amendment, to lift the caps on Family Care and related long-term care programs and continue the option of program roll-out to our area of the state and others as originally planned.

We understand certain members of the Assembly are considering creating additional roadblocks through an amendment to this bill that may affect whether our region can access the vital long-term supports offered through Family Care and IRIS. With a growing waiting list which collectively surpasses the size of that of any other area of the state, with the possible exception of Milwaukee, we ask that you strongly oppose such amendment.

While 57 Wisconsin counties now access Family Care supports, the 7 counties in the Northeast region – Brown, Door, Kewaunee, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto and Shawano – can easily be referred to as the “have not” region of the state when it comes to state funded long-term care (despite the continuation of legacy waivers). All seven of these counties have taken stock of the needs of their vulnerable residents with disabilities and seniors, worked collaboratively with stakeholders and sought significant public input to pass county board resolutions establishing the Northeast Wisconsin Family Care District in October 2010. When Brown County supervisors passed their resolution on September 15, 2010, they said, “a need exists for establishing the District, both within Brown County and the region served by the District. Specifically, the provision of quality and cost-effective long-term care services for the frail elderly and for adults with physical or developmental disabilities.”

There continues to be more than 650 Brown County residents waiting for long-term supports like bathing, dressing, meals, getting to work and community participation. There are more than 1,100 total residents waiting in our region - and without the assurance to move ahead with Family Care planning, their wait is indefinite.

The un-amended Senate version of the lift the caps bill which was passed unanimously does not remove any of the existing important legislative oversight that expansion discussions require. Our region fully expects to continue to share with both the Department of Health Services and the legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance, both our plans and cost-effectiveness calculations for implementing Family Care. This is the process that is currently required and it is sound.

We strongly advise that delaying expansion discussions for Family Care implementation will have a very significant impact in our region. The expansion was expected to result in employment growth at both the Family Care organization and with providers throughout the region who had been planning business expansions.

Long-term supports for vulnerable populations in Wisconsin should not be further politicized or stalled. Multiple studies show that supports in the community are much more cost-effective than institutional care and the old legacy waiver system is significantly more costly and inefficient.

In addition, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) indicated to Wisconsin in a December letter that the state must continue its original Family Care agreement in order to be in compliance. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau projected that 60% federal match funding, approximately \$1.7 billion, is at stake. Stalling passage of this bill and adding unnecessary roadblocks puts the care of not only our region but all our all state's vulnerable residents at risk.

Our counties agreed to the state's plan for Family Care and have watched as other counties and their residents have benefited and wait lists were eliminated. Other Wisconsin counties are realizing savings and people are getting the supports they need. We believe Northeast Wisconsin deserves the same options and our residents and taxpayer contributions should not be put in jeopardy.

Bottom line: Family Care is a necessary, cost-effective and popular program that the state's most vulnerable residents deserve to participate in regardless of where they live. Failure to pass this bill will result in a patchwork system of supports in Wisconsin that leads to growing waiting lists, stark inequality, increased hospitalization and unnecessary facility care – as well as a loss of autonomy and dignity for thousands of seniors and people with disabilities in our region and state.

We urge you to stand up for Northeast Wisconsin and pass an un-amended version of Senate Bill 380/Assembly Bill 477 that keeps us all moving forward.

(LIST OF ORGANIZATIONAL SIGNERS)