

For Immediate Release

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Disability Rights Wisconsin Disappointed with Joint Finance Committee Vote

Disability Rights Wisconsin is disappointed by the Joint Finance Committee vote to remove Medicaid expansion from the Governor's budget proposal. "Removal of the acceptance of Medicaid expansion has significant ramifications for children and adults with disabilities in Wisconsin," said Lea Kitz, Executive Director for DRW, "People with disabilities struggle to get needed services and support. The Governor's budget provided practical solutions to many of the issues they face."

Medicaid expansion would return to Wisconsin dollars taxpayers are already paying to the federal government. The use of those dollars would have tremendous benefit for programs that are critically important to Wisconsinites with disabilities. The following proposals would be funded with the funding leveraged by Medicaid expansion and now hang in the balance:

- Access to mental health and substance abuse services including expansion of crisis services, and rates increases for psychiatrists and other providers of behavioral health services.
- Address the severe lack of caregivers in Wisconsin with wage increases
- Eliminate waiting lists for children with disabilities in the long-term care system
- Access to dental services for people with disabilities
- Reduce lead exposure, a preventable cause of intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Greater quality controls and oversight for assisted living facilities

Failure to expand Medicaid also means Wisconsin will lose an opportunity to reduce the number of uninsured Wisconsinites and to allow BadgerCare members, including caregivers, to work additional hours and to earn more.

If the legislature does not expand Medicaid, the state will have to find \$391 million in funds to continue operating existing programs and an additional \$262.7 million to implement new health initiatives, for a total investment of \$653.7 million. Legislators commented during the hearing the State has revenue available to fund programs but offered no clear pathways to including these important programs in the budget.

The decision of the Joint Finance Committee to remove these perceived non-fiscal provisions from the budget today goes against the voices of the people who attended hearings around the State, and does not allow a robust debate on the needs of the people who would benefit from Medicaid expansion. These initiatives would help thousands of individuals and families in Wisconsin. As the Joint Finance Committee continues deliberation on the budget, we ask that policymakers reconsider, and find a way to support Medicaid expansion, including these important initiatives that are vital to the lives, health, and independence of Wisconsinites with disabilities.

Disability Rights Wisconsin is the state's designated Protection and Advocacy Agency, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping individuals free from abuse and neglect.

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