



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Disability Advocates Applaud Governor Evers' Commitments to People with Disabilities: Request Renewed Attention in Key Areas

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations was pleased to hear Governor Evers highlight priorities for people with disabilities in tonight's State of the State address, including a commitment to meet the needs of students with disabilities through an unprecedented \$600 million in funding for special education services.

"We have been hearing from families that the decade-long freeze on funding for students with disabilities in our schools is harming the quality of their education and in some cases having serious consequences," said Lisa Pugh, Co-Chair. "Committing to provide an additional \$600 million will move Wisconsin closer to the national average and ensure that our public schools can meet the needs of these students."

Survival Coalition members also applaud the Governor's pledge to address health disparities, expand Medicaid and pre-existing conditions protections, and support a five-fold increase in mental health programs for school-age children.

"One in five students in Wisconsin will face a mental health issue and over 80% of children go untreated," said Kristin Kerschensteiner, Co-Chair. "We are overdue for a meaningful mental health investment that gives greater access to mental health services in schools, increases pupil service staff, and focuses on preventing youth suicide."

The Governor also mentioned transportation as a priority in his first year in office. This will be extremely important to people with disabilities, many of whom do not drive and rely on family and public transportation to get to jobs, medical appointments, and to stay living independently.

"Many people with disabilities and older adults say that transportation options are non-existent in their communities, are unaffordable, unreliable, or unavailable at times they need them, or don't go where they need to go," said Beth Swedeen, Co-Chair. "We hope the Governor's new transportation task force will incorporate a multi-pronged approach with increases to transportation funding that include people who do not own or drive cars."

In addition to the priorities mentioned this evening, Survival Coalition will continue working alongside the Governor and the Legislature to address other key issues, including the significant direct care workforce crisis.

“Wisconsin residents are going without essential care or being forced out of their homes into more restrictive settings simply because of the need for direct care workers,” said Pugh. “Family members are stressed and reducing or leaving the workforce to provide needed care. We were disappointed this issue was not highlighted this evening.”

A recent survey shows that 95% of people with disabilities in our state have trouble finding direct care workers to fill the approved hours of service in their service plans.

Survival members were also hoping to hear tonight about a renewed commitment to children with the most significant disabilities. “As of December 2018, 1100 eligible children are waiting for long-term supports due to a lack of funding,” said Kerschensteiner. “Children with disabilities eligible for long-term supports through the Children’s Waiver are the only Medicaid eligible population in Wisconsin who must wait for services due to lack of funding.”

“Overall Coalition members are grateful that the new administration is demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the disability community,” said Swedeen. “We look forward to bi-partisan agreement to ensure quality of life for people with disabilities in our state.”

Survival Coalition is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.

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