

April 15, 2019

To: Senator Alberta Darling, Chair
Representative John Nygren, Chair,
Members, Joint Committee on Finance

From: Lisa Pugh, Executive Director

Re: The Arc Wisconsin 2019-2021 Biennial Budget Testimony

My name is Lisa Pugh and I am the Director of The Arc Wisconsin - a statewide organization that advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (or I/DD) and their families. We have 15 local chapters across the state, including near River Falls in Eau Claire and in Dunn County.

I would like to share 3 stories with you today. Please see our complete list of budget priorities at <http://tiny.cc/nx654y>

Increase Wages for Direct Care Workers for People with Disabilities:

The Arc Dunn County asked me to share the story of three people with disabilities who have lived in a group home in Menomonie for more than 10 years. It is their home. Local college students have been their caretakers. But this group of caring students graduates this spring. The Arc has been having great difficulty recruiting and keeping new workers. Workers that help people daily with meals, dressing, getting out in the community. Their starting wage is just \$11 an hour - with only \$3 an hour for the overnight shift. The Arc Dunn County has no choice but to close this home this spring, causing great stress on the residents who do not know where they go next.

We must do more to support and recruit quality, caring direct care workers for people with I/DD and pay them a decent wage with benefits. The Arc supports the Family Care direct care workforce increase, asks for attention to a similar increase for IRIS workers and suggests that the personal care rate increase must be much higher than the 1.5% proposed. We support a rate that gets workers to \$15 an hour.

Improve Dental Care for People with Disabilities:

My second story is from a Mom in Janesville who came up to me after a meeting hosted by The Arc Wisconsin and asked for help. Her 40-year-old son who is non-verbal lives with her. He will no longer let her brush his teeth. Some of his teeth are black and his gums look very sore. Their dentist closed his office and they cannot find another dentist who will take Medicaid and can help them. She was asking me to help her find a dentist.

We must do more to address the dental care crisis. People should not be in pain or have dental care that only involves pulling teeth - which is what happens to so many people with disabilities. We support the increase in Medicaid dental rates that are tied to the proportion of Medicaid patients a dentist serves. We need more dentists who have expertise and a practice that can support and accept people with complicated dental care needs. They must open their doors to these patients for routine dental care.

Increase Special Education Funding:

My final story is about a 19-year-old young woman with a disability who is in a school transition program trying to get a job before she exits public school next June. The school transition coordinator whose job it is to work with community employers and support staff to get jobs for 5 students is working on a one-year emergency license. There is no funding or staff time for training. Earlier this year a poorly trained school job coach got this student fired after just 3 weeks on the job. The young woman in this story just happens to be my daughter. I am beside myself that these sorts of issues and worse are happening in schools across the state due to lack of special education funding and resources.

We must do more to increase special education funding. The current 25% state reimbursement - among the lowest in the nation - is unacceptable. The Arc Wisconsin supports the Governor's proposal to get the state's funding commitment to 60%.

Support Medicaid Expansion:

In closing, this is a budget where we must look under every couch cushion for every penny to address these very serious problems. The Arc Wisconsin supports the sincere, bi-partisan exploration of Medicaid expansion to fund and improve our healthcare programs, including addressing the direct care workforce and dental care crisis. The significant federal funding match and the \$1.6 billion dollars in reinvestment these funds would bring to Wisconsin is needed. We should not be leaving these Wisconsin taxpayer dollars on the table or allow other states to benefit from funding that should be used for residents here.

Thank you for considering these requests.