

CO-SPONSORSHIP MEMORANDUM

TO: All Legislators

FROM: Representatives James Edming and Jimmy Anderson
Senator Tom Tiffany

DATE: Thursday, October 19th, 2017

RE: LRB-0753/1 – relating to integrated employment of persons with a disability and granting rule-making authority

SHORT DEADLINE: Thursday, October 26th at 4:00 PM

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Every year, we are reminded of the value of increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It is important to remember that inclusion in the workplace drives innovation.

People with disabilities want to work and there are Wisconsin employers who want to hire these capable, dependable workers. Any legislator who has participated in a Take Your Legislator to Work visit has seen this first-hand. However, there are many barriers that still exist for these individuals who often need specialized supports to work.

Several state agencies have responsibilities to fund services to help youth and adults with disabilities get jobs. The services are often fragmented and sometimes duplicated. The Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Workforce Development, and the Department of Health Services through programs like Family Care and IRIS spend significant public funds to prepare people for work. Despite their efforts, many people with disabilities who want to work still do not have jobs, many youth sit at home after leaving school, and many employers find the support system hard to navigate across departments.

LRB 0753 requires state agencies with responsibilities in this area to collaborate and develop a joint plan to help people with disabilities get employment in the community. The collaboration required under this bill will help agencies work better together, braid funding, and align policies so it is easier for people to get the support they need to find and keep a job and to eliminate funding waste and duplication of services.

The bill also requires state agencies to set benchmarks and report on progress. Currently agencies do not have to set goals to help them improve and mark progress toward increasing the number of people with disabilities who become employed. We know that when people with disabilities work and earn more, they cost public programs less.

Another important element of this bill is the preservation of choice; the bill specifically states that it will not limit access to or choice of allowable services, including prevocational services under Family Care and IRIS programs.

Recently the Department of Health Services worked with advocacy organizations and employment service providers from Rehabilitation for Wisconsin to establish guiding principles to increase competitive integrated employment. This bill aligns with those common goals.

This bill has earned the support of the following organizations: Survival Coalition, Rehabilitation for Wisconsin in Action, Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin, Inc., Easterseals of Southeast Wisconsin, Bethesda, Special Olympics Wisconsin, Wisconsin Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition, Black River Industries, and Headwaters, Inc. You can find statements of support attached to this email.

If you would like to co-sponsor this legislation and its Senate companion, please contact Rep. Edming's office at 6-7506 or Senator Tiffany's office at 6-2509 **before NOON on Thursday, October 26th.**

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill establishes a number of requirements for certain state agencies to promote competitive integrated employment, as defined under federal law. The requirements in the bill include all of the following:

1. A requirement that publicly funded programs that provide services and supports to working age persons with disabilities, when enabling the participation of persons with disabilities in activities outside their homes, prioritize competitive integrated employment.
2. A requirement that the Department of Workforce Development, with assistance from the departments of Public Instruction and Health Services, lead a collaboration among all state agencies that administer programs that provide services and supports to working age persons with disabilities.
3. A requirement that the three departments described above jointly develop a plan establishing specific performance improvement targets and describing specific methods used to coordinate efforts to ensure that programs, policies, and procedures support competitive integrated employment. The departments must update the plan biennially. The departments must also annually report on the progress, outcomes, and achievements made in increasing participation in competitive integrated employment in accordance with the plan described above. The departments must either publish or provide access to the plan and reports on their Internet sites or through a single, state-maintained Internet site.