

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Disability Rights Wisconsin Commends Governor Evers' Mental Health Budget Initiatives

Today, Governor Evers shared his proposal to expand BadgerCare and to invest over \$150 million in mental health and behavioral health services. Disability Rights Wisconsin supports this investment, which will expand access to mental health services for Wisconsin at a time of great need in our state. Expanding BadgerCare will ensure that more Wisconsinites with a disability and caregivers can access essential health care and mental health services.

"DRW commends the investment of over \$50 million for student mental health programs and resources," stated Kit Kerschensteiner, Director of Legal and Advocacy Services. "In our work with students with disabilities and their families, we often hear about the barriers they experience to accessing mental health services. The strains of COVID-19, virtual learning, and isolation from family and friends have increased the need for these critical supports." Expansion of the Child Psychiatry Consultation Program statewide has the potential to further support Wisconsin youth.

The budget includes funding for a new behavioral health treatment program to ensure folks who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind have access to mental health services. "DRW has long supported increasing access to accessible mental health services for Wisconsinites who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind," stated Barbara Beckert, Director of DRW's Milwaukee office. "This investment is an important step forward in addressing these long-standing disparities."

This proposal also funds a network of regional crisis centers, which will allow the person in crisis to be assessed and supported closer to their home and to their natural supports. Developing this regional capacity will result in better outcomes for those in crisis and reduce involvement of law enforcement in responding to psychiatric crises. Regional centers will ultimately reduce the need for people in crisis to be transported across the state to Winnebago Mental Health Institute, and will allow them to receive assistance closer to their community.

DRW looks forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature to increase access to mental health services and to advance recovery.

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Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping individuals free from abuse and neglect.

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