



**Media Inquiries:** Beth Swedeen (608) 266-1166

### **Medford Area Senior High Students to Testify in Support of Employment First bill**

(Madison) - Medford Area Senior High students will come to Madison on January 10 to testify about increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities during the WI Assembly Workforce Committee hearing on the Employment First bill, AB 625. The students will testify and share stories about the need for more supports for people with disabilities to get jobs.

“Our local students and adults with disabilities have the work ethic, vocational skills, personal characteristics, and special abilities that can be beneficial within integrated employment positions in our community. Employment First will provide greater opportunities by increasing collaboration and reducing barriers for integrated employment that will benefit our students, families, local businesses, and community,” said Joseph A. Greget, Director of Special Education/Student Services, Medford Area Public School District

“We know that students and young adults with disabilities want to work and contribute in their communities. They also love earning and spending a paycheck, just like everyone! This bill will prioritize spending by public programs on equipping and supporting people with disabilities to find and keep jobs. It’s a huge step toward ensuring every Wisconsinite with disabilities experiences employment success,” said Beth Swedeen, Executive Director, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

#### **What the Assembly Bill 625 does:**

Several state agencies have responsibilities to fund services to help youth and adults with disabilities get jobs. The services are often fragmented or duplicated. The Dept. of Public Instruction, the Dept. of Workforce Development (including DVR), and the Dept. 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 and many employers find the support system hard to navigate across departments.

The Employment First proposal (Assembly Bill 625 and Senate Bill 514) requires state agencies with responsibilities to provide employment supports to people with disabilities to collaborate and develop a joint plan to help people with disabilities get employment in the community. Agencies will braid funding, align policies and set goals to support employment and report progress each year.

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities. For more, see <http://wi-bpdd.org/>

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