

For Immediate Release

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Opportunity for Substantial Increase in Special Education Voted Down

Madison, WI - Today the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) voted down the \$600 million increase in special education funding proposed by Governor Evers. The JFC's omnibus motion included a modest increase of 26% reimbursement in the first year and a 30% reimbursement in the second year.

Disability Rights Wisconsin is disappointed that after a decade of flat funding the Joint Finance Committee voted for a much smaller reimbursement. The Governor's proposal would have addressed the serious gap in state funding for special education and would have begun to address the increasing costs school districts all over the state are facing as they educate children with disabilities.

"Disability Rights Wisconsin has advocated for increases in special education funding for many years. Working with students with disabilities and their families on a daily basis, we have seen the difficulty educators have endured in their efforts to provide quality special education across the state. Families have become increasingly concerned with the impact on their children's education," said Sally Flaschberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist. The budget proposal would have more than doubled the current reimbursement rate from just under 25% to 60% by the end of 2021 and would have met a portion of the 65% cost increases over the last ten years.

The Joint Finance Committee's motion also included a large reduction in the Governor's proposal to increase funding for mental health services. The proposal included \$22 million each year for additional social workers, school psychologists, counselors, and nurses in our public schools. The JFC's motion approved funding of only \$3 million each year. Phyllis Greenberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist, said, "We see an increasing number of students with unmet mental health needs. Often schools are the first to identify these issues when they have appropriate staff to look for the signs of children in crisis. The funding proposed by the Governor was a positive step toward ensuring the success of kids in our public schools."

Disability Rights Wisconsin will continue to work with the legislature to see if there are ways to include additional funding for students with disabilities across Wisconsin.

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Disability Rights Wisconsin is the state's designated Protection and Advocacy Agency, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping individuals free from abuse and neglect.

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