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Survival Coalition of Statewide Disability Organizations Responds to State Agency Budget Requests

(MADISON) – The Survival Coalition of Disability Organizations of Wisconsin recognizes key funding initiatives intended to support people with disabilities in state agency budget requests shared this week, but also notes critical areas that continue to be ignored.

Specifically, the Survival Coalition supports the Department of Public Instruction's budget proposal which takes bold steps to finally end nearly a decade of flat funding for special education by the State, increase mental health supports and services, support students in transition and repeal the current funding formula for the special need scholarship program.

DPI requests an investment of \$600 million dollars in special education categorical aid to bring the reimbursement rate to 60% by the end of the biennium. In addition to this commitment, the department prioritizes school mental health services with increases of over \$63 million dollars for student services, training, and school and community mental health collaborations. The Department also proposes a further investment of \$5 million annually in its Transition Readiness grants to better prepare students with disabilities for community employment and independence after high school by better equipping school district transition programs.

Survival Coalition also supports the DPI recommendation to repeal the current unfair reimbursement rate for the special need scholarship program to more closely match the reimbursement rate for students with disabilities in public schools, where most children attend.

Survival also supports the Department of Health Services recommendation to increase funding for the Children's Long-Term Support program by \$1.56 million per year for a total of \$3.2 million to address growth in the waitlist for children who need critical supports.

Unfortunately, state agency budget proposals do not meaningfully respond to the largely unmet transportation needs that impact every aspect of people with disabilities and older adults' lives. Lack of transportation is consistently identified as the number one concern by people with disabilities. People with disabilities need transportation initiatives that will increase the likelihood that people can get where they need to go on their schedule, and allow people with disabilities to live where they want, get or keep their jobs, get to medical appointments, and participate in their communities.

The state agency proposals also do not build on the funding included in the last budget to directly address the direct care worker crisis currently existing statewide in Wisconsin. A Survival Coalition survey of more than 500 people with disabilities and their families in late 2016 found nearly all (95%) reported difficulty finding and keeping workers that help them get out of bed in the morning, get meals, get to work and provide other important daily life supports.

State agency biennial budget proposals were publicly released Tuesday. Wisconsin's Governor typically announces a proposed budget in early February, and the State Legislature must vote on a final budget by June 30, 2019.

The Survival Coalition looks forward to working with the Governor's office and the Legislature to address these remaining issues to improve quality of life for people with disabilities across our state.