



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Survival Coalition Congratulates the Governor and Legislature for Investing in Employment of People with Disabilities

The Governor's signature today on a bill to increase funding and position authority for the state's vocational rehabilitation (VR) program is a significant step toward addressing the employment barriers faced by Wisconsin residents with disabilities, say members of the state's largest cross-disability coalition. Members of the Survival Coalition were in attendance at today's bill signing in LaCrosse where Governor Walker signed into law a provision that will invest approximately \$4 million additional state dollars over the biennium to capture the maximum federal matching funds for necessary employment supports for people with disabilities. The state to federal VR match is generous at 21.3% state funds to 78.7% federal funds which means Wisconsin's investment will draw down an additional \$14 million.

People with disabilities face extraordinary unemployment and underemployment. The employment rate is currently 70% for working-age persons without disabilities, while only 37% of people with disabilities are in the workforce. The fiscal bureau has determined the state's new investment will significantly reduce a growing waiting list for VR supports that stands currently at 4,129 individuals.

"We applaud the great bipartisan work of the legislature and the Governor to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities and meet employer workforce needs through this new law," says Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival Coalition co-chair. "We would especially like to thank Senator Shilling and Representative Shankland who originally authored this bill, and the Governor for including it in his workforce priorities." The bill passed the full legislature with near unanimous support.

Without additional funding, the state's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) had estimated that wait times to receive vocational supports would increase to between five and seven months by 2015.

"People with disabilities are not only an untapped labor pool in Wisconsin, they are also qualified, committed employees who save employers turnover costs," says Beth Swedeen, Survival Coalition co-chair. "This is an important time in Wisconsin's economy to invest in DVR and in employment of people with disabilities."

Research demonstrates the turnover rate for employees with disabilities is 8% in comparison to 45% for other workers.

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“This additional funding provides DVR with an opportunity to reconfigure and improve the quality of their supports statewide to ensure they are meeting consumers’ needs,” says Maureen Ryan, Survival Coalition co-chair. “It has been difficult for DVR to address the growing need in Wisconsin with their high caseloads. Now they can focus on quality outreach to businesses and provide the type of customer service that will lead to good outcomes for everyone.”

According to DWD, the 3,250 DVR consumers who returned to the workforce in 2012 are projected to earn \$56.4 million annually, representing a 210 percent return on the public investment. These earnings result in purchases of goods and services that in turn support Wisconsin's economy and transform successful DVR customers into workers and taxpayers, while also decreasing dependence on public assistance (i.e. utilization of food stamps, low income housing and Social Security Benefits.) People with disabilities in the United States are estimated to have an annual spending power of nearly \$800 billion.

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