

## EMPLOYMENT BUDGET PRIORITIES

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### STATEMENT

Wisconsin's economy depends on all workers being in the game. In 2016, Wisconsin's unemployment rate was only 4.2%, and since then, employers report a desperate shortage of workers, particularly entry-level employees. Nationally, studies consistently show that managers positively view people with disabilities, regarding them as easy to supervise and producing as much work, or more than co-workers without disabilities. Yet nationwide, the employment rate for people with disabilities is only 17.9%, compared with 65.3% for the general population.

### BACKGROUND

Wisconsin is having success in getting people with disabilities to work, but there is more to be done. Project SEARCH trains students with significant disabilities for a variety of jobs and has a nearly 90% employment success rate. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is serving more clients than ever before. Wisconsin PROMISE moving youth with disabilities and their families from reliance on public benefits to work and increased economic independence. Still, some populations of people with disabilities and some areas of Wisconsin are being left behind. Currently, working-age adults in Wisconsin's long-term care system are still only employed at levels of 4% to 10%. Many people with disabilities say they want to work in the community and are not connected to employment supports.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Survival Coalition recommends that Department of Health Services (DHS) develop a One-Time Provider Transformation Fund to support employment service providers in the state's long-term care system. Providers would be selected through a competitive process and must meet sustainable, measurable outcomes that move people who have shown an interest in working in integrated employment into competitive-wage community jobs. The Fund could operate similarly to the 2017-2019 Biennial budget direct care and services fund increase.
- Survival Coalition recommends that DHS implement a tiered rate system across long-term care programs that takes into consideration a person's individual employment support needs, differentiates between unique services and prioritizes competitive integrated employment.

- Survival Coalition recommends that Department of Workforce Development (DWD) develop a Transportation-to-Work Fund that matches employer contributions with state funds to provide transportation to a competitive integrated employment job.
- Survival Coalition recommends that Department of Children and families (DCF) support creation of an Individual Development Account (IDA) program, modeled after success in the PROMISE Youth Supplemental Security Income pilot project that matches youth earnings to purchase work-related expenses.
- Survival Coalition recommends that DWD increase access to high-quality benefits counseling to all workers with disabilities using strategies identified through the PROMISE project. Effective strategies identified in PROMISE have led to better outcomes at lower costs.
- Survival Coalition recommends that DWD continue support for the PROMISE Family Advocacy network system which has shown success in supporting families to reduce reliance on public benefits by connecting them with appropriate resources and supports that lead to employment.
- Survival Coalition recommends that (Department of Public Instruction (DPI) propose an increase in the incentive payments to \$1,500/youth (currently \$1000/youth) for competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes and ensure that payments are targeted specifically toward youth directly engaged in CIE or post-secondary education.
- Survival Coalition recommends that DPI create a \$100,000 incentive fund for schools to engage in Community Conversations related to employment for youth in their communities. Funds would be awarded with an expectation that a defined number of youth with disabilities achieve competitive integrated employment in the following year demonstrating an increase from the prior period. Schools could apply for \$1000 grants to conduct these conversations with required participation from area employers, community leaders and other stakeholders. The fund should account for necessary support to ensure implementation with fidelity. [Community conversations](#) have proven to be an extremely successful strategy for raising community and employer expectations for youth with disabilities, cultivating local commitment and getting youth jobs.
- Survival Coalition recommends that Wisconsin state agencies become “model employers, (Barnett, S., & Krepcio, K. (2011), In Brief.) developing strategies for moving people with disabilities into careers in state government. Recently, a number of governors have recognized the importance of increasing employment and work opportunities for people with disabilities within state, county and municipal government in addition to efforts to increase employment rates in the private sector.

- Continue funding of successful Partners with Business employment pilot to increase employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities and equip businesses to hire and retain workers with disabilities.

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