

To: Wisconsin Joint Committee on Finance

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From: The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations Co-Chairs:
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Re: Proposed Elimination of the Family Support Program

The Family Support Program is a very popular and effective program that provides a small amount of funding to support families and children with significant disabilities. The Governor's budget proposes to eliminate the Family Support Program and create a new Children's COP (Community Options Program). The existing COP program, managed by counties, was designed for adults with disabilities and frail elders. Turning Family Support into a COP program offers administrative efficiencies for counties, but does not appear to improve supports to families. For a Children's COP to be beneficial to families and children with significant disabilities the proposal must address the following:

The proposed Children's COP:

1. Must reflect the values and philosophy of the current Family Support Program;
2. Keep the focus on supporting the entire family, not just the child with disabilities;
3. Maintain the current flexibility and choice of supports to meet the needs of diverse families and;
4. Preserve current program funding for the purpose of Family Support;
5. Preserve the state funding structure for family support, without seeking a Medicaid waiver.

Recommendations:

1. As the name says, Family Support was designed to support families, while COP was designed to support adults. The current budget language does not mention families!
Recommendation: Support revisions to the proposed language to reflect a focus on supporting children and their families.
2. The Family Support Program offers maximum flexibility for supports and services to meet the diverse needs of families such as: after school care for an older child; special supplies and equipment; or education for the family to provide medical cares for their child. **Recommendation:** Support changes in the language that maintains this flexibility.
3. Current budget language instructs DHS to "seek a waiver of Medicaid law to obtain federal funding for Children's COP". If Children's COP became a Medicaid waiver then it would become significantly less flexible than the current Family Support Program and would also duplicate the existing Children's Medicaid waivers. **Recommendation:** Remove the "Medicaid authority" language for Children's COP from the budget bill.
4. The bill language refers to the reallocation of funding for Children's COP, but does not clarify the amount or where the money will go with in county administration. This needs to be clear in the bill and funding earmarked for supporting families. **Recommendation:** Request a fiscal analysis of the proposal and insure current funding is dedicated to supporting families.
5. No stakeholder groups, including the DHS Children's LTS Council, were involved in discussions to eliminate Family Support. **Recommendation:** Stakeholders must be included as further details are discussed.

Survival Coalition is interested in supporting programs that help families whose children have significant disabilities. The Governor's original proposal does not do this.