Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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January 27, 2010

To: Senator Tim Carpenter, Chair, and Members, Senate Committee on Public Health, Senior Issues, Long-Term Care, and Job Creation

From: Lynn Breedlove, Jennifer Ondrejka, and Maureen Ryan, Co-chairs, Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

Subject: Support for Senate Bill 96 (Nursing Home Diversion)

On multiple occasions over the last several years, the legislature has authorized funding for long term care services to divert a limited number of individuals who were about to be admitted to nursing homes (but would prefer to continue living at home or in the community). This program has helped to achieve one of the key goals of long term care reform, i.e. reversing Wisconsin's historical "institutional bias" (our past policy of providing an entitlement for nursing home care but not for in-home care). Several hundred people have now benefited from the program and there are many heart-warming stories of people enabled to live out their lives "their way" as a result. The program has also enjoyed bipartisan support since its inception.

Unfortunately DHS has always recommended a low cap on the program, e.g. 150 diversions. At the outset there was some uncertainty whether the program would actually save money. Now, after several years, we know that the average cost of the people diverted ($77.15/day) is well below the average cost of nursing home care for these individuals ($123.49/day)*. Even though DHS has the option of going back to the legislature and requesting authorization for another batch of diversions, this has created an impermanent, "on again, off again" perception of the program. It's as though the program can never get out of the "pilot" stage. This has led some counties to be wary of the program.

By the end of this biennium, Family Care will be operating in 59 Wisconsin counties, covering 90% of the state's population. In all of those counties, nursing home diversions

* DHS Fiscal Estimate for SB 96

can be funded via Family Care funds. So we only need a separate program as described in SB 96 in the non-Family Care counties. This should alleviate DHS' concerns re the future scale of the program. As Family Care expands to more counties, this program will gradually diminish. But the current disparity between non-Family Care counties and Family Care counties (long waiting lists and no entitlement vs. no waiting lists and a clear right to service) could be somewhat reduced by passing SB 96 and removing the cap on diversions once and for all.

In summary, if SB 96 passes:

a) **We can finally say to every elderly person and person with a disability in Wisconsin: "You will not be forced into a nursing home because there is a waiting list for the less expensive services you need to continue to live in your own home," and**

b) **Wisconsin will stop spending extra taxpayer dollars to serve people in nursing homes who could be served in their own homes for less.**

CWAG

Nino Amato, Executive Director

Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups

January 27, 2010

To: Senator Tim Carpenter, Chair, and Members, Senate Committee on Public Health, Senior Issues, Long-Term Care, and Job Creation

From: Nino Amato and John Hendrick, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups

Subject: Supporting Senate Bill 96 (Nursing Home Diversion)

One of the greatest fears for the one million Wisconsin residents over 60 is losing their option to live independently in the community. Even young and healthy seniors have in the back of their minds the worry that someday they will be forced to move from their own homes into a nursing home. This is the very real anxiety behind the joking advice, "Be good to your kids. Someday they will choose your nursing home."

Therefore, making services available so that seniors and persons with disabilities can live independently at home is one of the key priorities of long term care reform. In most counties, this can be addressed by eliminating waiting lists through the Family Care program. But Senate Bill 96 will help to address the situation in non-Family Care counties.

By removing the 150 person cap on the CIP II nursing home diversion program, you can promote the quality of life that most Wisconsin seniors would prefer while actually saving the state money. Experience with this program under the cap has proven that funding community services is less expensive to the state than funding nursing home costs.

Please support Senate Bill 96 to reinforce the independence of Wisconsin seniors and save taxpayer dollars at the same time.

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