

NEW HORIZONS UN-LIMITED INC.

April 11, 2011

To the Wisconsin State Senate and Assembly Joint Finance Committee Members:

Senator Darling, Senator Olsen, Senator Harsdorf, Senator Leibham, Senator Grothman, Senator Hopper, Senator Taylor, Senator Jauch

Representative Vos, Representative Meyer, Representative LeMahieu, Representative Nygren, Representative Strachota, Representative Joel Kleefisch, Representative Grigsby, Representative Shilling

2011-2013 Wisconsin State Budget Position Paper

We are New Horizons Un-Limited, a non-profit organization in Milwaukee, Wisconsin since 1994 that works to ensure that one day the inclusion and participation of individuals with disabilities, as full members of the community, the workplace and citizens of the state will not be an exception but an expectation.

We would like to urge the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee and Legislators to consider the fiscal consequences the state will incur if the committee continues with the proposed 2011-2013 Wisconsin Budget Bill cuts to transportation, education, transitional jobs programs, Family Care, and income maintenance. Broad cuts to these areas will be particularly devastating to those who depend the most on special education, public transportation to and from work, the ability to transition from the schools to work or from W-2 to work, community care, health care and access to benefits. These cuts will cause undue hardship and will have a particularly devastating impact on Wisconsin's most vulnerable citizens, those with disabilities, living and working in the community and initiate devastating and ongoing consequences to the financial costs to our state. The trickle-down effect in reverse will cause wide spread hunger, homelessness, unemployment, costly emergency care services and finally use of costly entitlement for institutionalization that as a state we are no longer prepared to provide.

Among our programs, we have and have partnered with other organizations to establish computer labs and have served hundreds of citizens with disabilities in Southeastern Wisconsin in computer training. We have refurbished and granted computer workstations to citizens with disabilities for use in their own homes and granted technical support. We have provided over 150 students with volunteer work experiences and training in office skills, Information Technology and internships in various applications. As an organization, we have first-hand knowledge of the problems citizens with disabilities face in learning, acquiring transportation, finding employment, waiting lists for job and health programs, accessing benefit programs and just affording basic needs: food, care, and shelter.

We implore the legislators to review how people with disabilities are able to learn, live and work in the community instead of being warehoused in institutions and how shifting to community care has saved the state \$6700 a month per person (additional cost of being institutionalized and would probably cost the state more to build new institutions). We further implore you to see the benefits both on the human side and the fiscal side of investing in our community members with disabilities as contributing members of society, as citizens who are able to learn, work **and pay taxes** and contribute to the state's economy, when they work, pay their rent, purchase homes, cars, shop for groceries, obtain health care, etc.

Outlined below are our concerns on how the proposed broad cuts to every aspect of community supports will, in our present economy, plunge our citizens with disabilities into emergency situations and therefore will have desperate consequences or institutionalization which will only exacerbate the state's financial costs:

Transportation

Due to the Budget Repair Bill there will be an additional loss of \$46 million in federal transit operating funds. Public transportation employees should not be included in the Budget Repair Bill and collective bargaining must be reinstated for them to continue federal funds for transportation.

Reducing public transportation and paratransit will strip thousands of Wisconsin citizens with disabilities of public transportation, their only means of transportation, leaving them isolated and unable to access their jobs, schools, doctors, grocery store, etc. Eliminating transportation to these core life needs: basic health care, employment, and education, will cause devastating increased financial costs on Wisconsin with potentially excessive costly emergency services, lack of employment as citizens fall back onto state entitlement programs and institutional care.

Education

Due to the cuts in education, and increased funding of choice, charter and open enrollments, children with disabilities will lose essential special education services in the public schools. As classroom sizes increase due to budget cuts, loss of

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aids, learning specialists and other support systems, opportunities for inclusion of students with disabilities will be reduced. Choice, charter schools will not fund inclusion strategies for special education and therefore students with disabilities will not be afforded opportunities in these schools.

Furthermore, transition services that prepare youth to move from a sheltered school environment to an independent work environment are imperative for those with special needs. Without developmental services in the schools and transitional services, students with disabilities, as they reach employment age, will not be prepared to become contributing members of society and will therefore have to rely on state aid into adulthood. Many of these individuals will not be equipped with the important life skills needed to live independently in the community and could therefore fall into costly institutional care, once again only exacerbating the financial costs of the state.

Without learning needs specialists in the schools, children with less severe disabilities that would have had developmental assistance in the past will go unidentified and will also be greatly hampered in education and fail to transition to employment, therefore creating more individuals exacerbating the financial costs of the state.

Income Maintenance

People with disabilities do not have access to many of the technologies that one would need to access an automated income maintenance system. It must not be taken for granted that everyone can access, use or afford technology. People with disabilities need to be able to get questions and assistance from an actual person with knowledge and training for working with people with disabilities and the complicated enrollment process of programs.

Family Care and Medicaid

Reduced services and benefits to programs that serve elderly and persons with disabilities, including BadgerCare, SeniorCare, Family Care, children's waivers and other vital programs or changes in co-pays and premiums may be made without legislative oversight or any public input. Reducing benefits, raising co-pays will result in cuts in care to individuals. It is not acceptable to assume such costs can be offset by those who can least afford or pursue support.

For adults and children with disabilities who depend on these services every day, postponing care, will have unintended consequences of greater costly emergency room services and institutional care. Any changes to the Medicaid program must be made with public input and the involvement of the entire legislature. Furthermore, Wisconsin changes must be federally approved or those served through the state will risk losing all funding.

Recommendations

We strongly recommend to not cut services and consider other fiscal options to support the Wisconsin State Budget:

- Consider revenue generators for the state. Wisconsin taxes are average and sales tax is lowest in the region.
- Consider smaller community based services run by recovery oriented consumers and peer support.
- Reduce unnecessary institutionalization.
- We support the budget recommendations of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations found at <http://www.dawninfo.org/co/sc/2011/Survival%20Talking%20Points.pdf>

Taking from those who have little is not a remedy, it is a disaster. The state has been working toward providing assistance through community service providers and helping people live and work in the community from a program to de-institutionalize citizens with disabilities begun by Tommy Thompson. It was found then, and continues today, that placing people in institutions is not the answer. The consequences and ramifications of the proposed budget of the lack of assistance to citizens with disabilities will not bring about the fiscal change the legislators desire, but will bring substantially more cost to the state.

To make Wisconsin work, all must share in fiscal responsibility. Anyone of us(we) could become disabled at any time. It is disheartening to think we are willing to throw citizens of our state(ourselves) away, at a time in their (our) lives when they(we) are most vulnerable from disability by not lending assistance when they(we) may need assistance to live, find care, and find new ways to work in our communities.

Sincerely,

NEW HORIZONS UN-LIMITED INC.