

To: Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
From: Disability Rights Wisconsin (Contact: Lisa Hassenstab, Public Policy Manager, lisah@drwi.org)
Date: February 6, 2024
Re: SB11 - relating to: specialized transportation assistance pilot program

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is a private non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities statewide, with a mission to advance the dignity, equality, and self-determination of people with disabilities. DRW serves as the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of children and adults with disabilities and keeping them free from abuse and neglect. With this mission and charge, DRW offers these comments for information only on SB856.

While DRW appreciates the goal of SB856 in expanding transportation options for individuals eligible for long-term care programs under Medical Assistance, we have concerns that the logistics of establishing and supporting a pilot program such as the one proposed in this bill would be unworkable. The complexity of working across current systems to allow for payments, receive approvals, and determine eligibility would be incredibly burdensome. In addition, capacity of the ADRCs to administer such a program as well as capacity and availability of transportation providers, particularly in more rural areas of the state, should be identified and addressed before forward movement on this type of proposal should be considered.

DRW has a number of policy principles regarding transportation for people with disabilities, including that “people with disabilities of all ages need access to timely, reliable, accessible and affordable transportation services in rural, urban and tribal areas”; and “people with disabilities must have the flexibility to travel throughout the region where they live to get to work, medical appointments, visit family, pursue individual interests and participate fully in their community in activities enjoyed by people without disabilities.” While the goal of this bill would be helpful in meeting these principles in some ways, it would still exclude people with disabilities who are not eligible for long-term care under Medical Assistance from accessing needed transportation options to pursue their interests and participate fully in their community.

DRW is committed to seeking solutions to the transportation challenges facing Wisconsinites with disabilities, including increased funding to already-functioning transportation programs serving non-drivers and exploration of increased coordination across these programs, as well as development and expansion of programs which serve the needs of non-drivers not being met by existing programs.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and please don't hesitate to reach out with questions.