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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 opposes AB465/SB480.

There are significant mental health implications for transgender youth when gender affirming care is banned, even for those not currently seeking gender affirming physical health care. Removing access to care can lead to depression, gender dysphoria, and suicidal ideation, among other mental health concerns. In a letter to the National Governors' Association (NGA) in 2021, the American Medical Association stated, "...**evidence has demonstrated that forgoing gender-affirming care can have tragic consequences. Transgender individuals are up to three times more likely than the general population to report or be diagnosed with mental health disorders, with as many as 41.5 percent reporting at least one diagnosis of a mental health or substance use disorder.** The increased prevalence of these mental health conditions is widely thought to be a consequence of minority stress, the chronic stress from coping with societal stigma, and discrimination because of one's gender identity and expression. Because of this stress, transgender minors also face a significantly heightened risk of suicide."<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

Evidenced-based best practices for gender-affirming care provide youth a stepwise process during which they partner with their medical providers, their parents, and mental health professionals to explore their gender identity in a safe and supported manner. The AMA notes in their letter to the NGA that studies:

- "suggest that improved body satisfaction and self-esteem following the receipt of gender-affirming care is **protective against poorer mental health and supports healthy relationships with parents and peers.**
- "**demonstrate dramatic reductions in suicide attempts, as well as decreased rates of depression and anxiety.**
- "show that **a majority of patients report improved mental health and function** after receipt of gender-affirming care."<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added)

Wisconsin youth who seek gender-affirming care should be afforded the opportunity to receive that care in a manner that supports their mental health not only in their adolescence but throughout their lifetime. AB465/SB480 would remove that opportunity and put the mental health of transgender and nonbinary Wisconsin youth – and adults – at risk.

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