

Disability Rights Wisconsin Support AB 710
Creating Stipends for Wisconsin Council on Mental Health – 1/27/2016

AB 710 will allow the Department of Health Services to pay a stipend to individuals who serve on the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health, or Council Committees, and meet financial need criteria. Disability Rights Wisconsin supports AB 710 because it will support meaningful involvement of people with lived experience of mental illness, and family members, on the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health and Council Committees.

The primary role of the Council is to advise the Governor, the Legislature and the Department of Health Services (DHS) on use of state and federal resources and on provision and administration of programs for persons who have a mental illness; review all DHS plans for services affecting persons with mental illness; and serve as an advocate for persons with mental illness.

To carry out this important role, it is essential that the Council include members with lived experience of mental illness, as well as family members, and diverse geographic representation from across Wisconsin. Participation in Council meetings and/or Committee meetings is a significant time commitment and may require taking considerable time off of work or from family responsibilities.

Many potential Council and Committee members are low income and financial barriers have limited their ability to serve on the Council or Council Committees. This bill will provide the needed flexibility for DHS, in consultation with the Council, to determine the amount of stipends, minimum financial need criteria, and any other criteria. Under current law, generally, council members may not be compensated for their services. AB 710 will provide DHS with the flexibility to address this need and help support diverse representation on the Council, and enhance the ability of the Council to carry out their important advisory role.

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