

To: Assembly Committee on Mental Health
From: Disability Rights Wisconsin, Phyllis Greenberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist
Date: June 4, 2019
Re: Assembly Bill 118 - increasing funding for the child psychiatry consultation program

Chairman Tittl, Vice Chair Jagler, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding AB 118 which would increase funding for the Child Psychiatry Consultation Program.

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is the designated Protection and Advocacy system for Wisconsinites with disabilities. DRW is charged with protecting and enforcing the legal rights of individuals with disabilities, investigating systemic abuse and neglect, and ensuring access to supports and services so that all Wisconsinites can learn, work, and live full lives in our communities free of abuse, neglect, and discrimination.

Wisconsin, like many states, is experiencing a severe shortage of child psychiatrists; 49 of Wisconsin's 72 counties have no child psychiatrist. The Child Psychiatry Consultation Program (CPCP) has provided additional capacity to address the extreme shortage of mental health supports for children and adolescents in our state. CPCP provides primary care providers with consultation from a psychiatrist and psychologist on issues such as diagnosis and medication management. The program also provides referrals to other mental health resources, as well as education and training for the participating primary care providers. While the need for the Child Psychiatry Consultation Program is statewide, funding constraints have limited expansion.

Parents often call DRW looking for services and supports for their children with mental health needs. We have heard many stories from parents experiencing very long wait lists for their child to get an appointment with a psychiatrist, including waiting over a year for that appointment. We have also heard stories of children and adolescents ending up hospitalized for psychiatric services, while they are waiting for an outpatient appointment. The hospital is a restrictive and often anxiety producing environment for children. If families were able to access outpatient mental health services to obtain an evaluation and medication recommendations, the need for hospitalization could be significantly reduced.

Given Wisconsin's severe shortage of child psychiatrists, the CPCP provides an innovative way to build capacity for supporting youth with mental health needs. CPCP has helped many primary care doctors provide better medication management, as well as referrals for additional services. This has resulted in better behavioral health care for children and their families in communities where CPCP is available. This bill will allow these services to be available to many additional providers and therefore allow them to better support the children within their communities. While this program will not solve all the issues that face families regarding their children's mental health, it has helped many families to get services more quickly, reducing symptoms and avoiding hospitalization – and with expansion can help many more.

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