

OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

The Autism Society of Wisconsin: Sweeping shift of authority for setting Medicaid policy threatens Medicaid programs, including autism services.

The Autism Society of Wisconsin issues a call to action to preserve and protect Medicaid services including those for autism. Families and those with autism must not lose their voice. Governor Scott Walker's budget repair bill is being widely debated and is receiving a great amount of state and national attention with its focus on the public sector unions. However, the Wisconsin's traditional open and transparent debate, with public input, is lost within this bill as an important language change will give the future of Medicaid to be decided by the legislature's budget committee. Shifting and circumventing the legislative process, the bill will allow the Governor and the Joint Finance Committee to make changes to the Medicaid program without that all important public input and may supersede state law provisions normally required.

This bill allows the Department of Health Services to study Wisconsin's Medicaid programs and then give them full authority to implement "emergency rules" that would go into effect without a vote from the full legislature. ASW, along with other disability advocates, believe that any changes to the Medicaid program must be made with public input and the involvement of the entire legislature. Giving the administration sweeping decision making authority to re-write the state health program, where Wisconsin has been a leader in access to public health care through BadgerCare, The Katie Beckett Program, Children's Long Term Support Waivers, Family Care and IRIS services, and other Medicaid coverage programs, without oversight, should not be made behind closed doors. Such decisions have an enormous impact on vulnerable families with children with autism who depend on these programs that provide vital health care and support.

We know the state is facing significant budget challenges, but this proposal does not save money for this fiscal year. The Autism Society of Wisconsin believes that the Medicaid provision should be taken out of the budget repair bill.

The Autism Society of Wisconsin calls for a budget process that allows people with autism, families of children with autism and other disability advocates and associations, to work with the Department of Health Services and Wisconsin legislators to determine future changes made to the Medicaid program.

If you have concerns about the budget repair bill and Medicaid program and how it affects you and your child with autism, contact your state representative and state senator as soon as possible. Visit <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx> if you are unsure about whom you should contact.

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