

### EXAMPLE 1

#### **Stop Special Needs Vouchers Testimony on AB1 2015 Assembly Bill 1: Public Hearing Testimony**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Donna Pahuski, and I am testifying on behalf of Stop Special Needs Vouchers, a statewide volunteer group led by families of students with special education needs.

I am also the proud mother of my 23 year old daughter, Mary, who was diagnosed with autism at age 3. Thanks to the investment that our neighborhood school made in her as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), she has now graduated from college and is enrolled at a medical school working on her Masters in Biotechnology. When asked about the major factors that contributed to her academic and social-emotional success, Mary summed up her experience in the Cambridge and Marshall school districts: "They were trained, ready and required by law to address my needs."

Trained, ready, and required by law to address the needs of students with disabilities. Wisconsin should expect nothing less in terms of accountability from schools that educate our students using our tax dollars.

AB1 falls significantly short of those expectations in several areas.

First, it is still not widely understood that private voucher schools in Wisconsin are not required to abide by the IDEA. This fundamental lack of voucher-school accountability for students with disabilities is one of our major objections to special needs voucher proposals. AB1 does not address the issue and therefore will not change that basis for our opposition to special needs vouchers.

Second, in order to have useful comparisons of enrollment and achievement data for students with disabilities, the disability data must be reported using common definitions. Public and charter schools report their disability-related data according to educationally-based categories in Wisconsin state law, but AB1 makes no such requirement for private voucher schools. Unless the definitions are apples-to-apples, the data will be meaningless to the families who need the information.

Third, we know that students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by suspension and expulsion. However, private voucher schools are not currently required to report suspension and expulsion data, and AB1 fails to offer any correction to that.

Finally, AB1 includes provisions that would require converting public schools into independent charter schools under certain conditions. However, we know that Milwaukee's charter schools and public schools are not currently serving comparable percentages of students with disabilities. Over 20 percent of MPS students are receiving special education services, while that number is under 10 percent in Milwaukee's charter schools. When it comes to students with cognitive disabilities, the numbers are even more concerning: MPS educates a five-times-greater proportion of students with cognitive disabilities than Milwaukee's independent charters. We have serious concerns about the prospect of turning over schools serving a high percentage of students with disabilities to a school sector that is currently failing to educate students with disabilities in fair proportions.

When it comes to students with disabilities, AB1 is a seriously flawed bill.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Donna Pahuski  
for Stop Special Needs Vouchers

## EXAMPLE 2

### TESTIMONY TO JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin

Submitted by: Barbara Katz, 4118 Cherokee Drive, Madison, WI 53711, 608.233.3726, [bjflash@charter.net](mailto:bjflash@charter.net)

Parent of 22 year old son with developmental disabilities; Co-Director of Family Voices of Wisconsin; and Chair, Board for People with Developmental Disabilities. Today, representing the Survival Coalition and the need for expansion within the Children's Long Term Support Waivers

I am pleased to be able to talk with you today. I believe that the citizens of Wisconsin deserve the opportunity to speak directly to legislators regarding the use of public funds. I appreciate this occasion and thank you for listening to me.

I am Barbara Katz, I live in Madison, and I serve as Chair of the Governor-appointed Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and am a member of the DHS Secretary appointed Council for Children with Long-Term Support Needs. I am also a member of the Survival Coalition, and I am speaking to you today on behalf of their platform on Children's Long-Term Supports.

First and foremost, I am the parent of a delightful young man, Ben, who is 22 years old and has significant cognitive disabilities. Since his birth, our private insurance, Medicaid, and the Madison Metropolitan School District have invested hundreds-of-thousands-of dollars in Ben so that he can be the most independent, productive and contributing citizen as possible. I am happy to report to you that today Ben holds four part time jobs in our community. Ben is a successful worker and is actively engaged. Ben's successes, in large part, are thanks to the support of the Children's Long-Term Support Waiver.

The waiting list for children in our state to receive long term supports is unacceptable. Since the program's inception in 1984, there have been only two appropriations to reduce the wait children have for needed services, in 2007/2009 and 2009/2011. Today, there are 3,000 children statewide who languish on waiting lists, waiting between 2-to-8 years before there is a waiver slot that is open for them. What this means is that children with disabilities are simply not getting the interventions they need at their appropriate developmental time. As a result, these children do not have the opportunity to reach their optimal levels of function and independence, requiring them to need more and more support for a longer time, thus increasing costs to the Medicaid program overall.

Many people will be talking with you about the need to expand Family Care and IRIS into the remaining 15 counties. I agree with them. But that request amplifies the extreme inequities that exist in Wisconsin between the long-term support systems for children and adults.

We have a generation of families who keep their children at home and in their communities, rather than placing them in an institution, which results in great savings for the state and taxpayers. But, being on a waiting list for years with no prediction of when services will be available sends a contradictory and disheartening message to families: "We want you to keep your child at home and not consider an expensive out-of-home placement, but we won't provide you an in-home support to do that."

I urge you to renew the commitment to end waiting lists for children with significant disabilities by serving an additional 1,000 children during the next biennium. An increase of \$5.4 million over two years will reduce the waiting list by 1,000 children and will greatly shorten wait times for the remaining children.

Thank you for your consideration. You hold the keys to the future of Wisconsin's children with disabilities and their families.