



May 26, 2017

Dear Senator Johnson,

The Autism Society Affiliates in Wisconsin serve individuals and families living with autism across the lifespan in the state of Wisconsin. Many of our members rely on the programs and services funded by Medicaid.

The Autism Society Affiliates in Wisconsin are extremely concerned about potential changes to the current Medicaid funding structure and the impact a change will have on Wisconsin families. With about 60% of Wisconsin's Medicaid costs currently covered by the federal government, a cut in federal matching funds would have a huge impact on access to critical programs and services.

In Wisconsin, federal Medicaid funding supports 20 critical programs providing health care and long-term care services to more than 1 million people in Wisconsin. A change in funding structure will impact programs like Family Care, IRIS, the Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) program, the Behavioral Treatment benefit covering autism treatment, and school-based services such as speech, occupational and physical therapies.

As the Congressional Budget Office projected: "With less federal reimbursement for Medicaid, states would need to decide whether to commit more of their own resources to finance the program at current-law levels or whether to reduce spending by cutting payments to health care providers and health plans, eliminating optional services, restricting eligibility for enrollment, or (to the extent feasible) arriving at more efficient methods for delivering services."

Wisconsin has made progress in supporting individuals and families affected by autism by investing in programs that help individuals with disabilities stay in the community and out of high cost institutions. Cuts to Medicaid funding could have a profound effect on the progress that's been made in Wisconsin and will be devastating to the families affected by autism we serve. Wisconsin families weigh in below about how meaningful Medicaid programs have been for them:

"We have found the support provided to our son through the Children's Long Term Support program has led to significant long term positive effects and we can only hope that other families will have the same opportunities. The services he's received have given him the essential building blocks to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. I can't imagine what his life would be like without this support, it's truly been a lifeline for our family."
– Wisconsin father of 14 year old with autism

“Our son is 27 years old and has autism. He relies on the IRIS program to fund job coaching and transportation services so that he’s able to work in an integrated setting. It also funds social outings in the community. Without this funding he would lose a job he loves and support that help him stay connected in his community. We worry what might happen to him.”

– Wisconsin Mother of a 27 year old with autism

“Cuts to the Medicaid program will further restrict access to care for autism, which currently affects 1 in 68 children. Access to behavioral treatment is critical to providing children with autism a chance at independence and minimizing the level of support required across their lifespan.”

–Wisconsin Mother of a Child with Autism and Owner of an Autism Treatment Center

We are concerned that Wisconsin will be left with the difficult decision of re-allocating funding to make up for federal cuts to Medicaid, raising Wisconsin taxes, or cutting/eliminating critical services and programs that people with disabilities rely on to live healthy, independent lives.

We are copying Governor Walker in this letter because of the uncertainty of how this decision will affect the state and its ability to remain committed to children, individuals and families affected by autism and other disabilities.

Please oppose per capita caps or block grants that may lead to reductions in federal funding without knowing how this may impact Wisconsin families.

Regards,

Kirsten Cooper, Executive Director, Autism Society of Wisconsin

kcooper@asw4autism.org, 920-215-3303

Emily Levine, Executive Director, Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin

emilyl@assew.org, 414-988-1260

Jeff Spitzer-Resnick, Member of the Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin Board of Directors

spitznick@tds.net, 608-206-7164

cc: Governor Scott Walker