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## **Disability Rights Wisconsin Seeks a Comprehensive Approach to School Safety**

Madison, WI- Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is encouraged to see an ongoing statewide discussion on how to best keep our students safe and advocates for legislation that is sustainable and flexible while offering a comprehensive approach to supporting students, especially students with disabilities, and the community. While a number of proposals have been introduced and the Governor has requested a special session on school safety, DRW calls for a legislative process with public hearings that allows for full public input from Wisconsin families, students, and educators on ways to best protect their local school.

Disability Rights Wisconsin supports increases in funding for behavioral and mental health, school climate and culture, trauma informed care trainings, and better reporting to parents on bullying. “The State already provided for increases in some of these areas but additional funding will reach more students in our public schools,” noted Amy Devine, Public Policy Coordinator.

Disability Rights Wisconsin has also advocated for an increase in special education funding over the course of several years. Students with disabilities continue to have unmet needs in our schools, leading to greater behavior challenges and social isolation. The current proposals lack any additional funding for special education. “Special education has remained flat for a decade, putting greater pressure on teachers and schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities. An increase in funding will help our teachers to be better prepared to work with students with the greatest needs,” said Sally Flaschberger, Lead Advocate.

Disability Rights Wisconsin also encourages legislators to look to the community for additional support for children with disabilities and their families. Our state has robust programs to assist children but families face barriers to get the needed services that can support their children at home, community, and school. Daniel Idzikowski, Executive Director, said, “We have been looking at a “no wrong door” approach for families to be able to access services. It seems like the time is now to seriously consider how we can re-vamp our support systems for children with disabilities to be sure as many children as possible access needed services.”

The Governor’s \$100 million proposal provides funding for physical safety for students and an increase in armed school safety officers but does not address what may lead to school violence. Research has shown that when police presence in schools increases, students with disabilities are suspended and expelled at higher rates. We would ask that our State Legislators consider a holistic approach to be able to provide the necessary resources for schools to be able to support students with disabilities who are facing challenges in their daily lives.

*Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin.*

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