

For Immediate Release

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## Disability Rights Wisconsin Supports Juvenile Justice Reform

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), the designated Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, is pleased with the passage and signing of the Juvenile Justice Reform Bill (AB 953), which points Wisconsin's juvenile corrections and treatment systems in a new direction.

DRW has engaged in both individual and systemic advocacy around the intersection of disability and the criminal justice system for many years. "Disability Rights Wisconsin has long supported a smaller regionalized model that emphasizes treatment, rehabilitation, and education, including specialized educational services consistent with each child's needs. This model holds the promise of providing better treatment options for youth closer to home," stated Managing Attorney Kit Kerschensteiner.

DRW encourages the Juvenile Corrections Study Committee to thoroughly study best practices for this population in making their recommendations. The success of this reform hinges on the state providing sufficient resources to ensure youth have the services they need for rehabilitation, including a full continuum of mental health and educational supports. Funding for facilities will not be meaningful unless accompanied by a new model of juvenile justice. It is also imperative there is oversight to ensure an environment where youth are safe from abuse, including an investment in the staffing and infrastructure needed to provide this oversight.

This legislation provides the opportunity to change the culture of our juvenile justice system and to promote greater family and community engagement to support these young people. DRW appreciates the efforts of both the Governor and Legislature to address what is a current and growing crisis in our juvenile justice system and looks forward to a continuing collaboration with all stakeholders to bring about juvenile justice reforms that will move Wisconsin forward.

*Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping individuals free from abuse and neglect.*

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