

Disability Rights Wisconsin Support AB 710
Creating Stipends for Wisconsin Council on Mental Health – 1/27/2016

AB 710 will allow the Department of Health Services to pay a stipend to individuals who serve on the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health, or Council Committees, and meet financial need criteria. Disability Rights Wisconsin supports AB 710 because it will support meaningful involvement of people with lived experience of mental illness, and family members, on the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health and Council Committees.

The primary role of the Council is to advise the Governor, the Legislature and the Department of Health Services (DHS) on use of state and federal resources and on provision and administration of programs for persons who have a mental illness; review all DHS plans for services affecting persons with mental illness; and serve as an advocate for persons with mental illness.

To carry out this important role, it is essential that the Council include members with lived experience of mental illness, as well as family members, and diverse geographic representation from across Wisconsin. Participation in Council meetings and/or Committee meetings is a significant time commitment and may require taking considerable time off of work or from family responsibilities.

Many potential Council and Committee members are low income and financial barriers have limited their ability to serve on the Council or Council Committees. This bill will provide the needed flexibility for DHS, in consultation with the Council, to determine the amount of stipends, minimum financial need criteria, and any other criteria. Under current law, generally, council members may not be compensated for their services. AB 710 will provide DHS with the flexibility to address this need and help support diverse representation on the Council, and enhance the ability of the Council to carry out their important advisory role.

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**Wisconsin Council on Mental Health: Matt Strittmater, Chair
Testimony on AB710
Assembly Committee on Health
February 3, 2016**

The Wisconsin Council on Mental Health (WCMH) is the statutorily-created, Governor-appointed advisory council on mental health. The WCMH wishes to provide this testimony in support of AB710 concerning stipends for certain WCMH members.

Not surprisingly, this bill is one that the WCMH has been promoting for a couple of sessions. The WCMH was created as a condition for Wisconsin to receive federal mental health block grant funds. Federal statutes require that at least half of the WCMH members be people living with mental illness, family members of children and adults living with these disorder, or advocates. The remainder are staffs from state agencies that play a significant role in policy related to mental illness and which are also identified in the federal statutes or providers of services.

Wisconsin has struggled to maintain the level of involvement of people living with mental illnesses and family members on the WCMH, in part because of the burden it creates for these individuals to participate. WCMH meetings are a full day every other month in Madison. WCMH members are also asked to participate in committee meetings. That means individuals, if they are working, need to take this time off. For those who are parents of youth with serious emotional disturbance it may mean making arrangements for care of their child for part of the day. While some individuals representing these stakeholder groups are able to do so in a paid work status, either because their employer generously supports their involvement or they work for an organization whose mission is specific to mental health, others do not. This legislation is aimed at this latter group to facilitate their participation.

As you can see, this bill requires no state GPR funds. The State has funds to administer the MHBG that also supports the operations of the WCMH. We also asked that the legislation not be overly prescriptive about who can receive the stipend and the amount so that the WCMH and the Department of Health Services can optimize the use of available MHBG funds (which vary from year to year) to achieve our goal of maximizing participation of people living with mental illnesses and their families.

Statutes allow some other Boards and Councils to provide stipends for their members. We do not know historically why this is not the case for the WCMH. But we believe this is a common sense modification to statutes that will allow the WCMH to meet federal requirements and accomplish our goals.

We thank you for your support.



Mental Health America of Wisconsin
Testimony on AB710; Shel Gross, Director of Public Policy
Assembly Committee on Health
Feb. 3, 2016

Mental Health America of Wisconsin urges your support of AB710 concerning stipends for certain members of the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health (WCMH).

The WCMH was created as a condition for Wisconsin to receive federal mental health block grant (MHBG) funds. Federal statutes require that at least half of the WCMH members be people living with mental illness (consumers), family members of children and adults living with these disorder, or advocates. The remainder are staffs from state agencies that play a significant role in policy related to mental illness, which are identified in the federal statutes, or providers of services.

Wisconsin has struggled to maintain the level of involvement of consumers and family members on the WCMH, in part because of the burden it creates for these individuals to participate. WCMH meetings are a full day every other month. WCMH members are also asked to participate in committee meetings. That means individuals, if they are working, need to take this time off. For those who are parents of youth with serious emotional disturbance it may mean making arrangements for care of their child for part of the day. Many of us serving on the WCMH, myself included, are in paid status during that time; some of these folks are not.

The bill allows stipends for those with financial need. It allows the Department of Health Services (DHS) to work with the WCMH to define this. However, the intention is that this is targeted at consumers and family members and only those who are not in paid status for the meetings. I estimate that about five of the current 16 WCMH members would be eligible for stipends. The DHS and WCMH would also set the level of stipend and could take into account the funds available and the number of individuals who require stipends. This will allow us to maximize participation of consumers and their families. I assume that stipends would be in the \$10-\$15/hour range. As you can see, this bill requires no state GPR funds. The State has funds to administer the MHBG that also supports the operations of the WCMH.

While I am not in a position to provide a solid fiscal estimate I can provide this sketch:

# of Members	# of WCMH meetings	Length of Meetings	Total Hours	Stipend/hr.	Total Cost
5	6	5.5	165	12.50	2062.50
	# of Comm. meetings				
5	9	2	90	12.50	1125

These numbers will vary, of course, based on how many individuals qualify for a stipend, how many meetings they actually attend and length of meetings. The bill also allows, but does not require, that other individuals serving on committees who meet similar criteria can be provided a stipend. The reason we recommended this two tiered approach is that the federal statutes require this consumer and family representation on the WCMH, but do not require that on the committees. We would like to provide this stipend to anyone who would qualify but recognize that there needs to be flexibility to operate within available funds.

While the cost details are difficult to nail down I can say with complete confidence that the DHS will be able to provide this stipend. I can do so because the DHS provided this stipend for a number of years before someone realized that they did not have the statutory authority to do so. This legislation then would just return things to the way they were; it is not creating a burden that is unreasonable.

Statutes allow some other Boards and Councils to provide stipends for their members. We do not know historically why this is not the case for the WCMH. But we believe this is a common sense modification to statutes that will allow the WCMH to meet federal requirements and accomplish its goals.

We thank you for your support.