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**Statement on Joint Finance Committee Decision to
Create Special Needs Vouchers for Students with Disabilities**

Today's announcement by Co-Chairs of the Joint Finance Committee that they will create a Special Needs Voucher program despite major objections to the policy amounts to a significant show of disrespect to families raising children with disabilities in Wisconsin. The fact that the proposal was inserted into the budget at the eleventh hour without discussion at recent budget hearings or creating an opportunity for families or advocates to review indicates a concerning lack of transparency.

Special needs vouchers have been repeatedly proposed and defeated in Wisconsin since 2011. No Wisconsin disability organization has supported a special needs voucher and parents have come out in the thousands to indicate their opposition.

Parents' main concerns to a special needs voucher proposal continue to be both a significant lack of protections of student and parent rights in voucher schools and the further draining of resources from the public school system where a majority of students with disabilities will continue to attend.

Disability organizations and families across the state have been consistent in demonstrating that special needs vouchers are not correlated with improved outcomes for students and every proposal introduced to date has lacked any meaningful accountability for either parents or taxpayers.

Legislators have the opportunity in this budget to promote a reasonable school choice option for families of children with disabilities by approving changes to the public school open enrollment system agreed to by school district administrators, school boards and families. Support for a robust change to open enrollment policies would go much further to meet the needs of a majority of families statewide.

Disability advocates and families ask for the opportunity to work with legislators to develop real solutions to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in the future.

Read Survival's other special education budget recommendations here:

<http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Survival-Coalition-K-12-Funding-Budget-Recommendations-Students-with-Disabilities1.pdf>

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Survival Coalition is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.