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Testimony
Before the Wisconsin Assembly
Committee on Aging and Long Term Care
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Heather A. Bruemmer; Executive Director , BOALTC

Madame Chair, members of the Committee, I want to express the sincere thanks of the Board of Directors of the Board on Aging and Long Term Care to you all for conducting this informative and enlightening hearing. The information and opinions that have been shared here today will, I am sure, serve to guide your consideration of proposals that come before the committee which will have a profound impact on the citizens of Wisconsin who are served by the Family Care (FC) program.

The Board on Aging and Long Term Care was, from the outset of FC, involved in assuring that members had access to an independent advocate to assist them in presenting and resolving their concerns and complaints. Originally termed the "external advocate," BOALTC was designated to administer a contract with an agency outside of state government to provide this service. In the first budget cycle of FC's existence, this contract was awarded to the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy, now Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW). Before external advocacy was able to become a fully operational and effective part of FC, the next budget passed by the Legislature defunded the program. From that point, it took until the 2007 budget cycle for the concept of independent member advocacy to again be made a part of Family Care. The Board on Aging and Long Term Care was elated to receive authority under the current budget to provide advocacy for Family Care Members aged 60 and over.

Family Care has always had, as a part of its concept, the principles of informed member choice, quality care, and a bundle of rights including the right to present concerns and grievances. This agency promotes and expects providers to deliver on these promised core principles and values. It is a priority of this agency to educate and inform members, ADRC and MCO staff, and providers about the members' right to access Ombudsman services.

The program has clearly shown a reduction in the prevalence of waiting lists in Family Care counties. Still, BOALTC has been kept busy assisting members to register and pursue their grievances through the FC grievance process, even to the point of appearing with members at hearings before Administrative Law Judges.

Members have found it necessary to complain about issues including a lack of personal input into the development of care plans, changes in cost-share calculation when transitioning from COP to FC, and breakdowns in communication between the care team and the member. Despite the complex nature and extraordinary demand for time posed by these issues, advocates have assisted members to present these sorts of issues and to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution in many cases.

Family Care is expanding and so is the elder population. The "60 and over" group's segment of the FC population will soon place an unmanageable stress on BOALTC. Similarly, the load on the "under 60" advocates at DRW shows no sign of diminishing in the foreseeable future. The continuing need for a seamless advocacy system does not imply that the Family Care program is ignoring the members when applying the principles of managed care in the long term care setting. The need does, however, indicate the fact that members frequently require help in coming to grips with the complexities of such a system.

Advocacy, in the form of the designated external advocates, the internal MCO member advocates, and the state's long-standing Benefit Specialist system is and will continue to be a necessary component of Family Care. Without advocates who are recognized as operating apart from the FC system, there is a very real chance that consumer trust and confidence in the entire program may crumble.

We know that a well-crafted, well-administered health care program can contain costs and, at the same time, deliver quality care that allows consumers to live a high quality of life. Family Care is approaching this goal, but has not yet achieved its full potential. The Board on Aging and Long Term Care hopes that your decisions and deliberations on measures affecting this outstanding managed long term care program will strengthen its respect for member rights and the quality of members' lives and care.