



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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February 7, 2018

TO: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang

SUBJECT: Assembly Bill 779 and Senate Bill 672: Grant to an Organization to Provide Referrals to Community-based Services

Assembly Bill 779 was introduced on December 27, 2017, and was referred to the Committee on Children and Families. On February 1, the Committee recommended the bill for passage by a vote of 10 to 0. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Finance on February 1, 2018.

Senate Bill 672, a bill identical to Assembly Bill 779, was introduced on January 4, 2018, and referred to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services. On February 2, 2018, the bill was re-referred to the Joint Committee on Finance.

BACKGROUND

In 2000, the Federal Communications Commission designated the telephone number 2-1-1 as a special three-digit dialing code that individuals could call to receive information about, and referrals to, appropriate local agencies and organizations that provide community based services. In Wisconsin, the Public Service Commission has granted authority to administer 2-1-1 services to 2-1-1 Wisconsin Inc., which is operated by United Way of Wisconsin.

When someone in Wisconsin dials 2-1-1, their call is routed to one of eight contact centers located in the state, where they are connected to an information and referral specialist. The specialist is trained to answer the caller's questions, and refer them to relevant agencies or services, if appropriate.

During calendar year 2017, 2-1-1 Wisconsin received approximately 297,000 requests for information, including approximately 217,000 telephone calls. The three largest categories of request were for information on housing and shelter (28.1%), food services (22.5%), and healthcare, including mental health and substance abuse services (15.2%).

In 2008, the Department of Health Services' Division of Public Health began distributing funding to United Way of Wisconsin for the purpose of operating the 2-1-1 service. This funding was provided to the Department as a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as part of the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Grant. In the past three years, the amount of this grant funding has been reduced, and in fiscal year 2017-18, the Department did not distribute any grant funding to 2-1-1 Wisconsin. The amount of grant funding distributed by the Department to 2-1-1 Wisconsin is shown in the table below.

Federal Grant Funding Distributed to 2-1-1 Wisconsin

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount of Grant Funding</u>
2014-15	\$236,000
2015-16	174,500
2016-17	125,000
2017-18	0

United Way of Wisconsin has reported that the minimum amount of funding required to maintain statewide 2-1-1 service at its current service level is \$210,000 annually.

BILL SUMMARY

The bill would provide \$210,000 GPR annually, beginning in 2017-18, for the Department of Health Services to distribute as a grant to a nonprofit organization to operate a statewide Internet site and telephone-based system to provide information on and referrals to community-based services, advocacy in accessing services, connection to crisis intervention, and follow-up contact. This funding would be provided in new annual appropriation in the Division of Public Health. The bill would require that the grant recipient agree to allocate funding for promotion of public awareness of the system and its purpose.

The bill does not specifically identify United Way of Wisconsin and the 2-1-1 system as the grant recipient, although they are currently the only entity in the state that is likely to meet the grant criteria.

FISCAL EFFECT

The bill would increase budgeted expenditures by \$210,000 GPR annually, beginning in 2017-18. In its fiscal note to the bill, DHS indicated that the staff time costs to administer the grant would be minimal (approximately eight hours per year), and could be absorbed by current staff.

Prepared by: Aaron Whitaker