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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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June 9, 2021
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JACQUE BILL AIMS TO EMPOWER THE DISABLED

Legislation initiates planning for tax-exempt “ABLE” savings accounts

MADISON, WI... Wisconsin’s efforts to empower individuals with disabilities continued today as the State Senate passed legislation in a voice vote directing state officials to draw up plans for tax-exempt savings accounts that can help cover the cost of services those with physical and cognitive challenges need to live full, independent lives.

State Sen. André Jacques (R-De Pere), co-author of the proposal with State Rep. Jeff Mursau, said that Wisconsin is currently just one of seven states that do not have their own Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) account program, although state residents may open accounts in other states.

“Growth of ABLE accounts in Wisconsin has been slow, perhaps because the state doesn’t host a general webpage or have its own program to promote,” Sen. Jacques said. “This bill should move our state closer to making these accounts more accessible and widely adopted by Wisconsin families who need them.”

Under current federal law, states may establish ABLE programs, which allow individuals classified with having a disability before age 26 to have a tax-exempt savings account set up in their name to cover certain expenses, including: education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, and other services. Enrollment in this program does not affect eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid.

Sen. Jacques said that when Wisconsin passed tax-exempt ABLE account legislation in 2016, the state chose not to establish its own program, instead allowing Wisconsinites to open accounts in other states. ABLE use in other states is estimated by financial planners to be significantly higher

“This legislation still allows Wisconsinites to take advantage of ABLE programs in other states,” Sen. Jacques said. “But the goal of planning for a Wisconsin program is to hopefully expand participation so that more of our friends and neighbors can build supplemental savings to access programs that enable them to do the everyday things most of us take for granted.”

Sen. Jacques said the Expanding Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Account Participation Act ([Senate Bill 158](#)) requires the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions to examine various aspects of establishing a Wisconsin ABLE program for state residents. The study is due six months after enactment of the law.

Sen. Jacques said he developed the legislation with the input of disability advocates and organizations who have lobbied for this change during the previous legislative session. The bill had cleared the Senate Financial Institutions Committee unanimously.

“This bill is a step in the right direction to help ease financial strains for disabled individuals, without putting their other benefits at risk,” Sen. Jacques said.

Senator André Jacques represents Northeast Wisconsin’s First Senate District, consisting of Door and Kewaunee Counties and portions of Brown, Calumet, Manitowoc, and Outagamie counties.