

Scott Walker  
Governor



**State of Wisconsin**

**COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**  
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Clerk for the Joint Finance Committee  
[joe.malkasian@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:joe.malkasian@legis.wisconsin.gov)

RE: Governor's Proposed Budget

Dear Joe Malkasian:

The Wisconsin Council of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was happy to see that the Governor's proposed 2013-2015 budget included funding for mental health services. Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind historically have had a difficult time accessing mental health and Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) programs. As a community we have long been denied access and as a result we do not get the preventative, treatment and follow up that we deserve. For that reason, the Council respectfully requests that some of these proposed funds be targeted to ensure that the mental health/AODA needs of people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind are addressed.

More mental health professionals skilled in communicating with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals would be extremely helpful. There are individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing who have the academic qualifications to become community based therapists; however, they are unable to do this in Wisconsin without first earning 3,000 hours of clinical practice. Communication barriers make this hard to attain. Clinical hours must have supervision which means that interpreters must be used. At the present time there is no money available for this type of interpreting service. Money specifically allocated for this would help to enable professionals with hearing losses to obtain licensure so they can provide culturally accessible mental health services in Wisconsin.

At the present time there is a steering committee working on improving mental health services for people with hearing losses. Money from a block grant secured by the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was used to begin a study of the needs of this population. The study culminated with a summit over one year ago outlining what needs to be done to improve those services. That money will be gone in several months and yet this important work needs to continue. Money allocated in the Governor's budget for the specific work of this committee to continue would be a way to ensure that this work to improve mental health services for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing communities would continue.

All aspects of the Governor's budget related to improving mental health programs apply to the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind communities. Our needs are broad and extend from

peer-supported programs to in-home counseling to improved mental health services in the correctional institutions in Wisconsin.

Please see that our members are not overlooked.

Sincerely,

The representatives on the Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing