

Hello everyone, and welcome to the first Legislative Alert about brain injury funding for the 2011 session.

I'm a staff attorney at Disability Rights Montana and also a member of the Board of the Brain Injury Association of Montana. During legislative years, my job is legislative advocacy for people with disabilities.

I have parked the 52 email addresses in the blind copy box so that these Alerts are easier to print out or read on a smart phone. You are getting this email because you are on the Montana Brain Injury Center board, the BIAMT board, or the Governor's Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council. That leaves out a lot of potential brain injury advocates, so please forward this list to others in your community, especially the brain injury support groups. If you send me additional addresses, I will add them to the list.

The legislative goals of Disability Rights Montana and the BIAMT are to secure funding for the Brain Injury Helpline, which is a computer-and-phone-based self-advocacy support program for survivors and families, and also for other community services and supports for survivors and families. We have two legislative strategies for achieving these goals, but this alert is just about the first one.

(The BIAMT has changed the name of this service from Resource Facilitation to Brain Injury Helpline for—we hope—obvious reasons. We apologize for any confusion.)

We are asking that the Legislature fund the Brain Injury Helpline by including an appropriation in HB 2, the budget bill. The request is for \$100,000 per year.

The Helpline got started five years ago with federal grant funding that the BIAMT asked DPHHS to apply for. The Helpline is a program that both reaches out to recent TBI survivors and supports those with older injuries but new challenges. It enrolls people as they are leaving hospital care and tracks them for two years, providing information and telephone-based support, and it also provides a way for any survivor or family member to identify resources, solve problems, or connect with a support group. It is the only free, statewide support program for people with brain injuries.

There was a rough transition after the federal grants ended, but in 2008, the Helpline received its first state appropriation of \$100,000. The Legislature awarded the same amount for 2009 and 2010.

\$100,000 per year has funded the overhead costs and two staff persons who run the helpline, supplemented with about \$25,000 per year from the BIAMT.

The problem is, those were all one-time appropriations added by lawmakers. The Helpline has never been included in the Governor's budget proposal, even though DPHHS has recommended that the Helpline be funded. Yes, 2011 is a terrible time to be trying to get new state funding, but try we must.

Our first opportunity to ask for an appropriation for the Helpline is next Tuesday, January 25th, at the joint appropriations subcommittee on health and human services. This is the day set aside for public testimony about the Senior and Long Term Care Division's budget, and that division is the TBI "home" in DPHHS. Since TBI doesn't really fit into any particular funding category, I am suggesting that people who want to testify show up for the 9:30 to 10:45 slot, which is reserved for "skilled nursing." I will clear this idea with the chairman and confirm the time period in the next alert.

I want to mention that the public testimony schedule includes half an hour for veterans' services issues, beginning at 8:00 a.m. We are working on getting at least a couple of veterans to talk about the needs of veterans with TBI who do not qualify for VA brain injury services. Please let us know if we can help get word to other veterans who might be interested in advocating for brain injury services and supports.

Please seriously consider making the effort to come to Helena on Tuesday, January 25th to speak to the 8-member joint appropriations subcommittee for health and human services, in Room 102.

I will get more information to you on Saturday, but meanwhile, here are some reasons to seriously consider doing this:

- Most lawmakers know little if anything about brain injury.
- Most have never heard of your organization or perhaps even your profession.
- Almost anything you tell lawmakers about brain injury will be new information that they can use.

- It isn't hard for an advocate to explain what the Helpline does, but it is REALLY HARD to explain the immense impacts of brain injury. We need your expertise—as a survivor, caregiver or professional.
- Without the participation of the survivor/caregiver/provider community, TBI will continue to be invisible.
- The Helpline is a simple bridge across the chasm of misunderstanding, ignorance and confusion that survivors fall into after they leave the hospital. It is a practical, effective and low cost service that makes sense for Montana, and it's the least we can do. We need to keep it going and build on the foundation it provides.

But if you can't make it next week, don't worry! There will be MANY other opportunities and ways to advocate.

Please let me know if you have any questions, and look for my next email, which will include talking points, directions, names of committee lawmakers and other information. I can be reached on my cell phone, 461-5350.

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