

Letter 26

February 15, 2017

Department of Employee Trust Funds GIB Liaison
P.O. Box 7931
Madison, WI 53707-7931

To the Members of the Group Insurance Board,

I am writing in response to the recent reinstatement of transgender exclusions in your Wisconsin group health insurance plans. In my position as Professor in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic at UW-Madison, I interact with undergraduate and graduate students and colleagues who are transgender. It is disheartening and, frankly, infuriating to see such exclusions reintroduced to your health insurance plans at a time when many of these students – and many other Wisconsinites and Americans – are struggling with their experiences as transgender people in non-inclusive settings. As many of us do what we can as educators and mentors to support these students, it is appalling to know that important medical treatments that they require will not be covered.

Transgender students do not have a choice and are not going through a phase, but have instead experienced life-long struggles. This policy of excluding transgender patients from transgender-inclusive coverage is yet another obstacle put in their way. It also runs counter to the recommendations of most major medical associations including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

These sorts of discriminatory policies are counter-productive if the state of Wisconsin aims to retain highly talented students after they graduate. Many of these individuals will leave the state of Wisconsin as soon as they finish their degrees, if not before. Please do the right thing for transgender people in Wisconsin and for the state's reputation and ability to retain talent.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to repeal this exclusionary policy.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Howell
John Bascom Professor of German and Dutch

Director
Language Institute
University of Wisconsin, Madison

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