



Wisconsin State Assembly

P.O. BOX 8952 MADISON, WI 53708

TO: SPEAKER ROBIN VOS

FROM: Representatives Joan Ballweg and Steve Doyle, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Assembly Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention

RE: Interim Report of the Assembly Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention

DATE: September 25, 2019

This report details the activities and the initial legislative recommendations of the Assembly Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention.

INTRODUCTION

The task force was created by Assembly Speaker Robin Vos on March 6, 2019, to study and make recommendations on policy initiatives to reverse the trend of increasing rates of suicide. Specifically, Speaker Vos presented the task force with a number of goals, including the following:

- Evaluate Wisconsin's current resources and programs dedicated to suicide prevention and awareness, identify where needs are not being met, and identify where improvements can be made.
- Identify opportunities to target and assist especially at-risk individuals, such as farmers and youth.
- Explore ways to better harness the use of technology to reach and understand vulnerable populations.
- Increase awareness and incentivize the use of evidence-based programs and protocols.
- Investigate treatment and support services options and eliminate barriers that hinder individuals from receiving care.

The report contains a brief description of hearings held by the task force throughout the state, explains the recommended legislation that was drafted in response to the testimony and discussion at those hearings, and identifies topics that the task force may continue to explore as the legislative session proceeds. A list of task force members is attached as an appendix to the report.

TASK FORCE HEARINGS

The task force held six public hearings throughout the state for the purpose of receiving testimony and generating ideas to address suicide in Wisconsin. The hearings were held on the following dates and in the following locations.

April 24, 2019, Madison

The task force held a public hearing at the State Capitol at which it received testimony about existing state-based and national suicide prevention efforts and resources only from the following invited speakers:

- **Joanette Robertson**, Mental Health Section Chief, Division of Care and Treatment Services and **Aurielle Smith**, Violence, Injury Prevention, Systems Integration, Adolescent Health and Opioid Harm Prevention Supervisor, Division of Public Health – Department of Health Services (DHS).
- **Charlie Severance-Medaris**, Policy Associate, Health Program – National Conference of State Legislatures.
- **Barb Bigalke**, Executive Director – Center for Suicide Awareness.
- **Shel Gross**, former Director of Public Policy – Mental Health America.
- **Beverly Goldberg**, Advocacy Chairperson, AFSP Wisconsin Chapter and **Gena Orlando**, Board Chairperson, AFSP Wisconsin Chapter – American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.
- **Misty Vaughan Allen**, Suicide Prevention Coordinator – State of Nevada Office of Suicide Prevention.

May 20, 2019, La Crosse

The task force held a public hearing at the La Crosse County Administration Building, at which it received testimony from the public and from the following invited speakers about county and private mental health resources:

- **Donna Christianson** and **Emily McGonigle** – La Crosse County Human Services Department.
- **Lisa Myhre**, BSN, RN, **Emily Flannery**, BSN, RN, **Kayla Jones**, MSN, RN, Inpatient Behavioral Health – Gunderson Health System.
- **Tim Candahl**, Chief Medical Examiner – La Crosse County Medical Examiner.
- **Dr. Jon Lehrmann**, Charles E. Kubly Professor in Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine – Medical College of Wisconsin.

June 17, 2019, Ripon

The task force first screened the documentary “Kids in Crisis: You’re Not Alone” and conducted a panel discussion with individuals from the documentary at Ripon College. The task force then held a public hearing at the same location, at which it received testimony from the public and from the following invited speakers that tended to focus on issues relating to youth mental health and suicide prevention:

- **Kate McCoy**, YRBS Coordinator/Research and Evaluation Consultant and **Gregg Curtis**, School Counseling Consultant – Department of Public Instruction.
- **Jackie Schoening**, Wisconsin Safe & Healthy Schools Training & Technical Assistance Center Coordinator – CESA 6 Safe & Healthy Schools & Communities Network.
- **Lanette Walker**, Youth Services Division Director – Ho-Chunk Nation Youth Services.
- **Oriana Eversole**, Research Analyst and Evaluator and **Alison Maresh**, Communications Specialist – Office of Children’s Mental Health.
- **Sandi Scott**, Dean of Students at the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Stout and **Tammy McGuckin**, Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Enrollment Services at UW-Parkside – UW System.

July 29, 2019, Marshfield

The task force received a brief introduction and tour of the National Farm Medicine Center at the Laird Center for Medical Research at Marshfield Clinic. The task force then held a public hearing at the same location, at which it received testimony from the public and from the following invited speakers that tended to focus on issues relating to farmers:

- **Casper Bendixsen**, Director – National Farm Medicine Center.
- **Angie Sullivan**, Farm Center Supervisor and **Frank Friar**, Economic Development Consultant – Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).
- **John Shutske**, Professor and Extension Specialist – UW-Madison Division of Extension.

August 12, 2019, Eau Claire

The task force first screened the documentary “Saved from Suicide” and conducted a panel discussion at Chippewa Valley Technical College. The task force then held a public hearing at the same location, at which it received testimony from the public and from the following invited speakers that tended to focus on veterans, law enforcement officers, and other first responders:

- **Margo Keys**, PhD, Vice President of Student Services – Chippewa Valley Technical College.

- **Deputy Warden Paul Ninnemann**, Oakhill Correctional Institution, **Dr. Daniel Huneke**, Psychological Services Supervisor, New Lisbon Correctional Institution, and **Paulina de Haan**, Legislative Advisor, Office of the Secretary – Department of Corrections.
- **Dana Vike**, Certification and Training Supervisor, Division of Law Enforcement Services, Department of Justice.
- **Jackie Halverson**, **Matt Friese**, **Kami Ward**, **Stacy Komar**, and **Michael Dejarles** – Department of Military Affairs.
- **Colleen Rinken**, Director, Bureau of Health Services and **Karla Peterson**, Outreach Coordinator, Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program – Department of Veterans Affairs.

September 9, 2019, Wauwatosa

The task force received Question. Persuade. Refer. (QPR) training at the Medical College of Wisconsin. The task force then held a public hearing at the same location, at which it received testimony from the public and from the following invited speakers:

- **Dr. John Raymond**, President and CEO – Medical College of Wisconsin.
- **Dr. Barbara Moser** and **Leah Rolando** – Prevent Suicide Greater Milwaukee.
- **Dr. Stephen Hargarten**, Director, and **Sara Kohlbeck**, Assistant Director – Comprehensive Injury Center.

RECOMMENDED LEGISLATION

Based on information and recommendations received at the public hearings, Chairperson Ballweg and Vice-Chairperson Doyle propose to introduce the following initial package of bills.

LRB-3871/1: Suicide Prevention Program

Background

Suicide prevention efforts are currently made by a variety of local, state, and national public and private entities and organizations. The task force was presented with examples of how some states have attempted to coordinate such varied efforts in order to maximize their reach and impact, including via the creation of an office to coordinate statewide suicide prevention activities or the designation of a specific employee within a state agency to do such work.

The Bill Draft

LRB-3871/1 vests in DHS the general duty to implement a suicide prevention program that creates public awareness for issues relating to suicide prevention, builds community networks, and conducts suicide prevention program trainings for law enforcement personnel,

health care providers, school employees, and others who have contact with people who are at risk of suicide. The bill draft authorizes two full-time equivalent (FTE) positions at DHS, one of whom must be designated the Director of Suicide Prevention, and appropriates \$250,000 per fiscal year for the purpose of fulfilling the agency's suicide prevention responsibilities.

Specifically, the bill draft requires that DHS do the following:

- Coordinate suicide prevention activities with other state agencies.
- Provide suicide prevention educational activities to the general public.
- Provide training to people who routinely interact with people at risk of suicide, including training on recognizing a person who is at risk and referring such a person for appropriate treatment or support services.
- At the county level, develop and carry out public awareness and media campaigns targeting at-risk populations and coordinate the establishment of local advisory groups in each county to support the efforts of the DHS suicide prevention program.
- Enhance crisis services relating to suicide prevention.
- Link people trained in the assessment of and intervention in suicide with schools, public community centers, nursing homes, and other facilities serving people who are at risk of suicide.
- Work with various groups at the local, state, and national levels to identify and address the barriers that interfere with providing services to groups of people who are at risk of suicide.
- Develop and maintain a website with links to appropriate resource documents, suicide hotlines, credentialed professional personnel, state and local mental health agencies, and appropriate national organizations.
- Review current research on data collection for factors related to suicide and develop recommendations for improved systems of surveillance for suicide and uniform collection of data related to suicide.
- Develop and submit proposals for funding from federal government agencies and nongovernmental organizations.
- Administer grant programs involving suicide prevention.
- Submit an annual report to the Legislature that describes the suicide prevention activities in the state, including information received in the course of administering suicide prevention grant programs.

LRB-3872/1: Grants for Suicide Prevention Programming

Background

The task force heard testimony regarding the positive efforts made by local coalitions of organizations to address and reduce suicide in their communities. It was noted that local efforts tailored to the unique needs of a particular community can, in some circumstances, be more effective than implementation of standardized activities. Further, collaboration can maximize the impact of local suicide prevention activities while minimizing duplication of effort.

The Bill Draft

LRB-3872/1 biennially appropriates \$500,000 for distribution by DHS to organizations or coalitions of organizations, which may include a city, village, town, or county, for suicide prevention programming. DHS may award a grant of up to \$10,000 in a single fiscal year to an eligible organization or coalition that contributes at least 20% of the grant amount in matching funds or in-kind services.

LRB-4241/1: Grants for Preventing Suicide by Firearm

Background

The task force heard testimony regarding a variety of programs and techniques that are being implemented around the state to increase public awareness about and to reduce suicide. One model for working towards these goals is commonly called Gun Shop Project, under which firearm retailers receive training on how to recognize and avoid selling or renting firearms to people who may be considering suicide. Via such projects, firearm retailers also commonly agree to distribute suicide prevention materials in their places of business and offer voluntary storage of firearms in a safe, which can limit a person's access to a firearm during a time of crisis.

The Bill Draft

LRB-4241/1 biennially appropriates \$150,000, from which DHS must award grants to organizations or coalitions of organizations, which may include a city, village, town, or county, for any of the following purposes:

- To share guidelines and train staff at a firearm retailer or firearm range on how to avoid selling or renting a firearm to a person who may be considering suicide.
- To provide suicide prevention materials for distribution at a firearm retailer or firearm range.
- To provide voluntary firearm storage.

DHS may award a one-year grant of up to \$5,000 to an eligible organization or coalition that contributes at least 20% of the grant amount in matching funds or in-kind services. The grant may not be renewed, but the bill draft does not prohibit a recipient from applying for a

subsequent grant in the future. However, when awarding grants, DHS must give preference to organizations or coalitions that have not received a grant in the past.

LRB-4373/1: Grants to Support Peer-to-Peer Suicide Prevention Programs in High Schools

Background

The task force heard testimony regarding the effectiveness of peer-to-peer support programs, like Hope Squads and Sources of Strength, in schools. In general, such programs train students to recognize suicide warning signs in their peers and to report those signs to an adult. Such programs also commonly work to improve school culture and reduce stigmas about suicide and mental health so as to create an environment in which students and school staff develop positive, supportive relationships. However, programs require the initial purchase of proprietary materials and training and require a certain amount of funding for ongoing licensing costs.

The Bill Draft

LRB-4373/1 appropriates \$250,000 per fiscal year for distribution by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in the form of a competitive grant to public, private, and tribal schools that operate high school grades for the purpose of supporting peer-to-peer suicide prevention programs. Under the bill draft, a school board, independent charter school operator, private school governing body, or tribal school may apply for a grant of up to \$1,000 per school, to support the establishment or ongoing work of a peer-to-peer suicide prevention program in the high school grades. A grant to a particular school may be renewed up to three times, so that a school may receive up to four years of funding. In awarding the grants, DPI must give preference to an application that seeks to establish a new program over an application that seeks funding to support an already established program.

LRB-4361/1: Grants to the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Center

Background

DPI and the Wisconsin cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs) have collaborated to establish the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools (WISH) Center, which provides various trainings and technical assistance to Wisconsin public schools. Trainings include prevention and intervention programs for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse, mental health programs, and programs to promote school safety. The task force received testimony that the WISH Center could increase its impact with additional staff. Currently, the WISH Center is supported by the work of four regional coordinators and an executive director. Because the WISH Center is not itself a legal entity, DPI provides funding via grants and contracts awarded to the CESA that employs the executive director, which is currently CESA 4.

The Bill Draft

LRB-4361/1 requires that DPI annually award a grant to a CESA to support the work of the WISH Center, described in the bill as a collaborative project between DPI and CESAs with the purpose of building the capacity of school districts to implement prevention and intervention programs for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse, mental health programs, and programs to support school safety. The CESA that receives the grant must first use funding to support the ongoing operations of the project and, to the extent funding is available, may then expand the services offered to school districts to include training and technical assistance related to general wellness.

The bill draft appropriates \$70,000 in fiscal year 2019-20, recognizing that much of the fiscal year will have passed by the time the bill draft is enacted, and appropriates \$200,000 in fiscal year 2020-21.

LRB-4178/1: Suicide Prevention Hotlines on Student Identification Cards

Background

The task force heard testimony regarding efforts being made in some school districts to print or otherwise include information regarding suicide prevention and crisis support hotlines on student identification cards as a means of making students more aware of such resources.

The Bill Draft

LRB-4178/1 provides that the following elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational entities may be required to include certain suicide prevention information on student identification cards:

- UW System institutions and college campuses.
- Wisconsin Technical College System campuses.
- Any private post-secondary institution that awards associate degrees or higher.
- Public school boards.
- Independent charter school operators.
- Private school governing bodies.

If one of the entities described above issues student identification cards, then it **must** include on each card the telephone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, or another similar network if the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline ceases operations. Additionally, an entity described above **may** include any of the following information:

- A statement that the Crisis Text Line may be accessed by texting HOPELINE to 741741 or, if applicable, any successor method.

- Instructions for contacting a text-based national organization, other than the Crisis Text Line, that provides free support to individuals in a crisis 24 hours a day and seven days a week.
- The telephone number for a local suicide prevention hotline.

The bill draft provides that this requirement may be satisfied by printing the required information on an identification card or affixing a sticker to the card that contains the required information. If enacted, this requirement would take effect beginning July 1, 2020, and would first apply to identification cards issued on that date. However, a public school board, independent charter school operator, or private school governing body may choose to use up any existing supply of nonconforming identification cards before it must issue compliant identification cards.

LRB-4247/1: Farmer Tuition Assistance Grants

Background

Under prior law, the Legislature funded an appropriation that authorized DATCP to issue tuition assistance grants to low-income farmers who enrolled in a course on farm and business management techniques offered by a technical college. This appropriation was created in the 1997-98 legislative session, was funded through the 2001-02 legislative session, and was repealed in the 2007-08 legislative session.

The task force heard testimony regarding the significant stress that farmers endure relating to their businesses and a recommendation was made to recreate this appropriation in order to encourage farmers to enroll in the course. It was suggested that the course currently provides both practical tools and a network of peer support to help farmers succeed, which may, for some farmers, alleviate stress that may otherwise lead to more significant mental health issues, including suicidal ideation.

The Bill Draft

LRB-4247/1 recreates the former appropriation and biennially provides \$100,000 for farmer tuition assistance grants for low-income farmers who enroll in a course on farm and business management techniques offered by a technical college. Under the bill draft, DATCP may fund all or a portion of the course tuition for an eligible farmer.

LRB-4167/1: Interim Psychologist License

Background

The task force heard from a number of speakers that many parts of the state are suffering from a dearth of mental health professionals in the face of increased need for mental health services. It was suggested that alternative licensing requirements may help address the scarcity by opening up additional pathways for individuals to become qualified to provide mental health

services. As one example, offering an interim license to certain mental health professionals while they are obtaining the experience required for full licensure may encourage individuals to start practicing in Wisconsin earlier and remain here.

Under current law, in order to practice psychology, a person must first obtain a license from the Psychology Examining Board (“the board”), which requires that a person satisfy the following conditions:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- With limited exception, not have an arrest or conviction record.
- Hold a doctoral degree in psychology from an accredited college or university or have had academic training that the board deems equivalent.
- Have had at least one year of experience in psychological work under conditions satisfactory to the board, which includes completion of 2,000 hours of supervised experience within no more than 24 months.
- Pass required examinations.

The Bill Draft

Under LRB-4167/1, the board must issue an interim psychologist license to an individual who submits an application, pays the specified fee, and satisfies all of the requirements for a psychologist license, described above, except for the experience requirement. An individual with an interim psychologist license may provide psychological services, but must do so under the supervision of qualified supervisors, as determined by the board. An interim psychologist license is valid until the individual obtains a permanent license, up to a maximum of two years, and may not be renewed unless the board has promulgated rules allowing for renewal in cases of hardship.

LRB-4287/1: Continuing Education for Certain Health Professionals

Background

The task force heard testimony regarding the variety of professionals who interact with people who may be at risk of suicide. It was suggested that such professionals may be in a good position to recognize suicide warning signs and to either provide or refer the individuals to appropriate treatment or support services.

Under current law, physicians, psychologists, social workers, therapists, counselors, and prevention specialists are all credentialed professions that require ongoing continuing education for credential renewal.

The Bill Draft

LRB-4287/1 requires that the following professionals complete at least two hours of suicide prevention continuing education every two years in order to renew the applicable credential:

- Substance abuse counselors.
- Clinical substance abuse counselors.
- Prevention specialists.
- Physicians.
- Psychologists.
- Social workers.
- Advanced practice social workers.
- Independent social workers.
- Clinical social workers.
- Marriage and family therapists.
- Professional counselors.

RECOMMENDED LEGISLATIVE ACTION BY THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Grant for a Text-Based or Application-Based Suicide Prevention Program

Background

Individuals who are in crisis may seek immediate assistance by texting the Crisis Text Line, which provides free access to a trained crisis counselor from anywhere within the United States 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Wisconsin, this text-based service is called HOPELINE and is supported by the Center for Suicide Awareness, which pays a licensing fee to the Crisis Text Line. Via that partnership, the Center for Suicide Awareness is able to market the Crisis Text Line number, 741741, and to obtain a wide range of data and statistics regarding Wisconsin's use of the service. Currently, the state does not contribute funding to support this text-based service.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the task force that the Joint Committee on Finance approve a motion that requires DHS to award a grant to a nonprofit organization to support staff, training, and expenses related to operating a text-based or application-based suicide prevention program and that appropriates \$110,000 annually for that purpose. The task force also recommends that

receipt of the grant be conditioned on compliance with certain reporting requirements. Specifically, the grant recipient must annually submit a report to DHS describing the expenditures of the grant funds and containing aggregated data relating to the use of the text-based or application-based suicide prevention program that ensures the anonymity of individuals who contact the program, including data collected by the recipient and all data provided to the recipient by third-party organizations and by individuals who contact the program. In turn, DHS must then annually report to the Legislature about the suicide prevention activities in the state, including the information received from the grant recipient regarding the text-based or application-based suicide prevention program.

DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force heard a number of recommendations that it has a continued interest in exploring. The following issues may be developed into legislative recommendations as the 2019-20 legislative session proceeds:

- Creating disclosure protections for law enforcement peer support services.
- Identifying school-based accommodations or best practices for working with students who have attempted suicide.
- Standardizing death reporting forms and creating suicide death review teams, which may require training in the practice of conducting psychological autopsies with the family and friends of an individual who died by suicide.
- Increasing services and supports for veterans.
- Embedding threat assessment units in law enforcement offices.
- Establishing a statewide suicide prevention call center to increase the capacity to handle Wisconsin-based calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the state.

A final report with a complete package of legislative and ongoing recommendations will be published following the final scheduled floor period in 2020.

MEMBERS OF THE SPEAKER'S TASK FORCE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

Representative Ballweg (Chair)

Representative Doyle (Vice-Chair)

Representative Schraa

Representative Tittl

Representative VanderMeer

Representative Stafsholt

Representative Duchow

Representative James

Representative Oldenburg

Representative Kurtz

Representative Sargent

Representative Kolste

Representative Anderson

Representative Brostoff

Representative B. Meyers