

State Rep. Andraca introduces bill to help improve emergency services

Proposal helps communities consolidate, improve EMS response

MADISON — State Representative Deb Andraca (D-Whitefish Bay) introduced a bill (LRB 4360) Thursday to assist cities, towns and villages consolidate emergency dispatch services. District 23 includes portions of Ozaukee County.

“Sharing fire and emergency services is an effective way to provide better services at lower costs without raising taxes to do so,” Andraca said. “This bill will help municipalities share emergency dispatch services while addressing one of the most urgent issues facing our cities, villages and towns.”

An October 2021 Wisconsin Policy Forum Report, “In Need of Resuscitation,” found that many communities are struggling to maintain existing EMS staffing models as call volumes rise and rosters of part-time staff decline. The report specifically mentions Ozaukee County, where consolidation discussions are underway among several municipalities.

“The state should encourage communities to work cooperatively on shared services wherever feasible,” Andraca said. “This narrow, targeted exemption, available only for consolidated

dispatch services, would make sure communities are rewarded for being fiscally responsible.”

For example, the consolidated North Shore Fire Department, created in 2006, avoided a 24% increase in costs to taxpayers according to an analysis by the Wisconsin Policy Forum, according to a press release.

“Communities that want to consolidate emergency services are often frustrated by the state-imposed levy limit,” the press release reads. “To address the problem a levy limit exemption was created at the state level for joint fire departments.

Emergency dispatch has an exemption at the county level but it does not apply to the many cities, villages and towns pursuing a consolidated model.”

This bill helps ensure emergency services are affordable and available to any local municipality pursuing consolidation, according to the press release.

“Whenever we call 911, we expect help right away,” said Andraca. “As legislators, we should be helping our municipalities do the right thing for our residents, first responders and taxpayers.”