



For Immediate Release

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Fighting Opioid Addiction Means Expanding Medicaid and Reinstating Earned Release Program

MADISON – Just days before Governor Walker will deliver his annual update on the condition of the state – in the midst of a budget shortfall, record transportation borrowing, and continued sluggish economic growth – he announced a special session of the State Legislature to tackle the opioid epidemic. Specifically, the Governor issued new directives to state agencies and called for the legislature to implement recommendations made in a report issued yesterday by the Task Force on Opioid Abuse, an entity he created less than four months ago.

“The opioid epidemic has taken a massive toll on Wisconsin’s families and communities. As elected officials, we should be doing everything possible to confront this public health emergency,” said Rep. Hintz. **“The work done by state and local leaders in Wisconsin has been critical in combating this substance abuse problem.”**

“However, doing everything we can as a state to help those battling addiction also means disregarding ideology and revisiting past decisions that have negatively impacted the health of those suffering. Specifically, this means accepting the federal Medicaid expansion funding and reinstating sensible corrections policies that don’t continue to criminalize addiction.”

Wisconsin is the only state in the upper Midwest that has refused to take the Medicaid expansion funding, costing state taxpayers more than \$678.6 million. Accepting the Medicaid expansion money would give more people access to affordable insurance for addiction recovery services. In other states, Medicaid recipients can now access substance abuse disorder benefits, including residential treatment, opioid treatment programs, and recovery support services. Ohio Governor John Kasich justified his state’s support for the Medicaid expansion by saying, “When we take the drug addicted and we treat them, we stop the revolving door of people in and out of prisons and average of \$22,500 a year.”

“Republicans shouldn’t deny drug treatment services to addicts just for ideological reasons,” said Rep. Hintz.

Governor Walker and Wisconsin Republicans are years behind other state Republican leaders in efforts to divert drug addicts and other non-violent criminals from the prison system. Governor Walker’s long standing approach has made no distinction between drug abuse and crime, leading to a “prison beds or bust” policy. In the 2009-11 state budget, Governor Doyle and Democrats created an earned release program that allowed courts to reduce the sentence of drug offenders who successfully completed certain programming or treatment. The Department of Corrections provided programming and treatment aimed at reducing the risk of someone reoffending. In 2011, Governor Walker and Legislative Republicans repealed the earned release law.

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