



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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VanderMeer's Mental Health Coalition Bill Receives Hearing

Madison – Yesterday, the Assembly Committee on Local Government held a public hearing on Assembly Bill 530, authored by Representative Nancy VanderMeer (R-Tomah), Representative Beth Meyers (D-Bayfield), and Senator Luther Olsen (R-Ripon). Under the proposal, grants would be awarded to local mental health organizations and coalitions for suicide prevention programming.

The bill is one of a number of recommendations from the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention, of which Representative VanderMeer and Representative Meyers are members of. The bipartisan task force, led by Representative Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan) and Representative Steve Doyle (D-Onalaska), traveled around the state to hear from suicide survivors and experts, advocates for suicide prevention and families who have been impacted by suicide.

Legislators on the task force were charged with evaluating the current resources for suicide prevention in our state and identifying opportunities to target and assist at-risk individuals. An interim report and [policy recommendations](#) were released on September 25, 2019, with the goal of supporting those struggling, promoting trainings to recognize the signs of suicide, and stopping the rising trend of suicide in Wisconsin.

A number of public hearings were held across the state earlier this year by the task force in order to meet their objectives. Assembly Bill 530 was inspired by testimony heard at task force hearings and from Representative VanderMeer's close involvement with the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition. Under the bill, local entities across the state can apply for grants for suicide prevention programming, including: trainings, awareness campaigns, stigma reduction, peer-to-peer counselling and more.

Leaders from the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition had the opportunity to testify in favor of the legislation at the hearing in Madison. Sparta Police Chief David Kuderer testified about the coalition's help with law enforcement, Tiffany Giesler of the Monroe County Health Department helped explain the coalition's mission, and Kim Johnson and Elizabeth Evans offered their perspectives on how the coalition helps local non-profits. Additionally, Monroe County Mental Health Coalition Director Kayleigh Day, Vicki Riley of Monroe County Human Services and Tomah Police Chief Mark Nicholson offered written testimony to the Assembly Committee on Local Government related to their involvement with the coalition in Monroe County.

Representative VanderMeer released the following statement:

"As a member of the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition, I have seen firsthand the value a local



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mental health coalition can have on a community. Additionally, after traveling around the state the past five months with the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention, the need for local suicide prevention training, stigma reduction and raising mental health awareness became abundantly evident. I believe helping local community coalitions will go a long way in accomplishing these goals. I am very thankful to the members of our local Monroe County Mental Health Coalition who were able to testify on this bill today. Their testimony before the legislature was valuable in explaining the mission of our local organization and helping to demonstrate why it is important to our area, as well as how local coalitions could be beneficial to communities throughout our state."

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The 70th Assembly District includes portions of Monroe, Jackson, Portage and Wood counties.