



Wisconsin State Legislature

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May 11, 2017

Legislature Approves HOPE Agenda Bills

According to the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 6,600 regular users of heroin live in Wisconsin. From 2008 to 2014, annual heroin deaths in Wisconsin has quadrupled, from 70 deaths per year to 267 deaths per year. Over the last couple of years, the Wisconsin State Legislature has approved new laws and initiatives aimed at tackling the heroin and opioid epidemic. Collectively, these bills are part of the HOPE (Heroin, Opiate Prevention and Education) Agenda. Following work done by the Governor's Task Force on Opioid Abuse last year, new legislation was proposed this session to continue that work. Two of these bills deal specifically with helping children under the age of 18. Following approval by the State Assembly, these bills were referred to the Senate Education Committee, of which I chair. Our committee passed the bills on April 24th. On May 2nd, they were approved by the State Senate, paving their way to become law with Governor Scott Walker's signature.

In 2013, 15% of Wisconsin high school students reported taking prescription drugs for recreational purposes. We have learned that people are 40 times more likely to use heroin if they are addicted to prescription painkillers. The first bill voted on by the Senate Education Committee, 2017 Special Session Assembly Bill 6, creates a recovery high school for students who have completed a treatment program. When teenagers get help for alcohol or drug abuse, one of the problems they face is returning to high school and falling in with the same crowd of friends who they did drugs with in the first place. A recovery high school provides support and therapy, along with academics, to improve the likelihood that teenagers will successfully overcome their addictions. Special Session Assembly Bill 6 specifically directs the Office of

Educational Opportunity at the University of Wisconsin System to authorize a recovery charter school.

Recovery high schools have been successful in other states. The committee heard from people involved with a private recovery high school in Madison who explained that one of their biggest challenges is funding. Special Session Assembly Bill 6 addresses part of this problem by requiring insurance companies to cover treatment and mental health services at a recovery school if they cover those services elsewhere. Additionally, the bill provides a grant of up to \$50,000 available for the recovery high school if the Office of Educational Opportunity obtains matching funds.

Another challenge that schools face is a lack of personnel trained to identify and help students with mental health or drug abuse issues. These are not the skills we expect teachers, principals or other school staff to have been taught while they were in school, yet they are increasingly needed in our schools. The second bill the Senate Education Committee approved, Special Session Assembly Bill 11, provides \$200,000 in funding for SBIRT training. SBIRT stands for screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment program. It is an evidence-based strategy to address mental health, drug use, drug abuse and addiction issues in schools. The Department of Public Instruction estimates that each session of SBIRT training costs \$5,000, with sessions of 30 participants. Expanding the number of SBIRT trained adults will help connect students with trusted adults who can help them avoid the peer pressure to try drugs and alcohol. Governor Walker has also proposed funding for this and other evidence-based strategies in his 2017-19 proposed state budget.

Critics of these bills sometimes argue that the bills do not do enough to combat opioid and heroin addiction. While no legislation is a silver bullet, these two bills take the necessary steps forward by providing concrete ways to reach young people struggling with addiction. The State Senate approved a total of nine bills this month that are a part of the HOPE Agenda. Watch for additional information on those bills in the coming weeks.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.

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