



## Wisconsin State Legislature

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### **Legislature Approves HOPE Agenda Bills**

Between 2013 and 2014, heroin overdose deaths increased by 18 percent in Wisconsin. Some of the factors contributing to this increase include the falling price and improved distribution of heroin as well as the availability of pure heroin, which does not need to be injected. At the beginning of May, the State Senate approved nine bills that are part of the HOPE Agenda (Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education), the Wisconsin State Legislature's ongoing efforts to combat opioid and heroin use, sending them to Governor Scott Walker's desk for his signature. These new bills provide additional tools for law enforcement, the medical community, and educators to combat heroin use.

The Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) program began in 2005 with grants to counties for programs like deferred or suspended prosecution for drug and alcohol offenders. The goal then, as it is now, is to avoid increasing prison costs and to reduce recidivism by finding other ways to deal with drug and alcohol offenders. Today, there are 45 TAD grants encompassing 46 counties and two tribes that help to support over 50 treatment courts and diversion programs. While fourteen new counties received grant money this year, four counties and one tribe were turned away because of a lack of funding.

Special Session Assembly Bill 2 provides \$4.8 million to expand the TAD program. \$4 million of that money would go to TAD grants, \$300,000 would be used to expand treatment court and diversion programs into more counties, and \$522,000 is designated for a diversion pilot program for nonviolent offenders. According to Attorney General Brad Schimel, treatment courts are a less expensive alternative to jail or prison time. The University of Wisconsin's Population Health

Institute found that TAD participants were nine times less likely to return to prison than other offenders, resulting in a state savings of \$1.93 for every \$1 invested in TAD programs, along with avoiding 200,000 prison days, for a savings of more than \$15 million. Additionally, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals found that drug court participants were significantly less likely to relapse or participate in criminal activity.

The second bill, Special Session Assembly Bill 10, provides funding for four new criminal investigation agents focused on drugs and drug trafficking. Drugs like heroin are not made here in Wisconsin, but rather are brought into the state from other parts of the world, like Asia and Mexico. While the state was able to curb meth production and use in the state with restrictions on the sale of pseudoephedrine, we must look at other ways to reduce the availability of heroin. These new agents will be able to focus on gathering intelligence about where and how heroin is entering the state and who is bringing it in. Located throughout the state, they will provide support to local law enforcement agencies and will enhance cooperation between state, local and federal agencies. This will enable comprehensive heroin intelligence gathering and sharing among agencies.

Effectively combating heroin and opioid use requires cooperation from a wide range of professionals, from local police, social workers, drug treatment experts and circuit courts to the state Department of Justice and the federal government. The HOPE Agenda bills that have been approved this session show how many different approaches are needed to combat heroin and opioid abuse. In my next column, I will share some information about bills we approved to expand treatment to those who need it.

*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](mailto: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>.*