

# Assembly adjourns after passing bills on public assistance programs

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The Assembly has adjourned after passing several bills making changes to state public assistance programs.

That included a bill, AB 240, that adds W-2 participants whose kids are habitually truant from school to a list of those who can face sanctions from the Department of Children and Families.

Rep. Joe Sanfelippo, R-New Berlin, the author of the bill, disputed claims from Dems that the bill was punitive, saying it would help those families get case management services under the Learnfare program.

He and other Republicans said the state needs to do all it can to help families make sure their kids get a proper education.

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“Punishing is letting a child go through life without getting an education to be able to support themselves and their family,” he said.

Assembly Dems tried adding several amendments to the bill, including one to make sure the bill would apply to those in 5th grade and under and another to exclude children from disabilities.

Rep. Jonathan Brostoff, D-Milwaukee, said lawmakers have taken the right path with the HOPE agenda in ensuring they’re not being punitive.

“That is the same mentality we should be using on this,” he said.

The Assembly’s adjournment came despite Dem efforts to try to get the chamber to

take up a resolution aimed at protecting those with pre-existing conditions. Democrats have slammed the American Health Care Act, which passed the House last week, as gutting protections under the Affordable Care Act and raised concerns over Gov. Scott Walker's recent comments on the issue.

Rep. Daniel Riemer, D-Milwaukee, said the resolution would "keep these very important protections in state law," and Dems criticized Republicans for refusing to take up the resolution today.

The chamber also passed:

\*AB 242, which makes changes to the drug screening and testing requirements in certain programs managed by the Department of Children and Families. It also expands those requirements to custodial parents in some DCF programs.

Under those programs, those who test positive for drugs can get access to treatment services.

Dems said other states that have similar requirements in place have spent far too much money on programs that don't turn up many positive test cases. And that's also the case here in Wisconsin, said Rep. Lisa Subeck, D-Madison, noting the state has screened about 2,000 people under the DCF programs and has only found eight people who tested positive for substance abuse.

Rep. Jimmy Anderson, D-Fitchburg, said similar programs in other states have been ineffective.

"Why are we not testing corporate executives who receive funding from the WEDC?" he asked.

The bill also lets DCF decide what kind of screening method it uses, as it currently is required to use a questionnaire to see whether any participants then need to go through a drug test.

Rep. Cody Horlacher, R-Mukwonago, said he was "perplexed" by Dems' arguments, saying the bill gives DCF officials who are most knowledgeable the flexibility to set up its screening methods.

Having beneficiaries go through that screening and testing, he said, ensures the state can "continue to help those who struggle with substance abuse." He also said

the numbers Dem cited show the vast majority of people in those programs wouldn't be affected.

\*and AB 241, which looks to mitigate the benefit drop-off in the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program. The bill passed on a 97-0 vote.