

Rep. Skowronski: Legislators announce Alzheimer's and Caregiver bill package

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MADISON – Today, Wisconsin State Assembly legislators announced a package of seven bills aimed at improving the care of those affected by Alzheimer's, related dementias, life-threatening illnesses and the lives of their caregivers. The bills were authored by Rep. Ken Skowronski (R-Franklin), Rep. Mike Rohrkaste (R- Neenah), Rep. Pat Snyder (R- Schofield) and Rep. Paul Tittl (R- Manitowoc)

“This package of bills builds on the tremendous work the Assembly Task Force on Alzheimer's and Dementia began last session,” Skowronski said. “I am excited to take the next step to improving the lives of those with Alzheimer's, life-threatening illnesses and their caregivers with this bill package.”

The seven bills included are aimed at: improving palliative care in Wisconsin, ensuring the safety of those who have a Silver Alert issued, financially easing the burden on the lives of those that leave the workforce to become caregivers, improving caregiving for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia, creating new opportunities for professional development through dementia specialist certifications, easing the legal burden caregivers and family members face by improving uniform adult guardianship jurisdiction, and increasing recognition through virtual dementia tours and by awarding Alzheimer's and dementia awareness grants.

“At the hardest time of a patient's life, receiving appropriate palliative care is

critical,” said Rep. Snyder, author of LRB 3748 on the palliative care advisory council. “I am happy to sponsor a package of bills that aim to ensure those who are suffering from these diseases, and their loved ones, are receiving the best care possible.”

“Alzheimer’s and dementia affect hundreds of thousands of our fellow Wisconsinites every day, and that number only continues to grow,” said Rep. Rohrkaste, author of LRB 4206, the Alzheimer’s and Dementia Awareness Grant. “From those living with these diseases to the countless caregivers who assist them on a daily basis, we need to let these people know that there are resources available to them.”

“Raising awareness about Alzheimer’s and dementia is incredibly important both for those living with these diseases and their caregivers,” said Rohrkaste. “If more Wisconsinites knew about Alzheimer’s and dementia we would be able to diagnose earlier and would also be able to provide family, friends, and co-workers with knowledge about these diseases.”

“As our population ages, it is important that we take care of our elderly with honor and dignity. These bills are an important step in that direction,” said Rep. Tittl, author of LRB 3916 Virtual Dementia Tours, said.

The bills are currently being circulated for cosponsorship. All authors hope their bills receive bipartisan support.

Detailed Bill Description

LRB 3748 Palliative Care Advisory Council (Snyder): This bill would establish a Palliative Care Advisory Council consisting of doctors, healthcare professionals, advocates, hospital administrators, and medical students. Wisconsin would join 21 other states in establishing a similar council that is directed to consult with and advise the Department of Health Services. The Palliative Care Advisory Council would meet to positively impact the policies of DHS and the Legislature regarding palliative care. The goal of the council would be to understand and evaluate the impact palliative care has on families, experiences of families that have used palliative care services, practices and protocols of doctors within the palliative care field, and areas in which palliative care can be improved. The board would be required to develop biennial legislative reports and sunset after 10 years.

LRB 1243 The Silver Alert Fix (Skowronski): This simple fix ensures that if a credible Silver Alert has been issued for the driver, law enforcement must notify the

Department of Transportation. DOT must do a follow-up review to consider restrictions for that driver. Individuals for which the silver alert has been issued and their guardians are also referred to local aging and disability resource centers.

LRB 3913: Dementia Specialist Certifications (Skowronski): This bill would create a 40-hour voluntary certification for CNAs, nurses and assisted living center administrators with the goal of improving caregiving for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia, creating new opportunities for professional development and helping facilities attract and retain new workers. This bill would ensure that everyone using the term "Certified Dementia Specialists" would have a standard knowledge base. Those looking to place their loved ones in care facilities would know that a "Certified Dementia Specialist" completed a state-sponsored training program. A certified dementia specialist would be trained in the challenging behaviors and situations that often arise with a patient with Alzheimer's and dementia.

LRB 4231 The Caregiver Tax Credit (Skowronski): Across the country, there are 40 million people who are caregivers for family members with Alzheimer's or dementia. Of those 40 million, caregiving is their primary responsibility as many have left the workforce, or reduced the amount of time they are working to care for a loved one with a significant illness. Family caregivers are unpaid, but the economic value of their care is in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Caregiving for a loved one is not just an incredible responsibility and emotionally stressful but financially burdensome. Family caregivers who leave the workforce could lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages and benefits over their lifetimes. To help alleviate the costs associated with caregiving, this bill offers a \$1,000 tax credit to qualifying families for expenses related to caregiving.

LRB 3615 Uniform Adult Guardianship Certifications (Skowronski): The impact of dementia on a person's ability to make decisions and without other advanced directives, people with Alzheimer's disease may need the assistance of a court-appointed guardian. Once appointed that guardian may make legal, economic, and personal well-being decisions for the individual.

However, in our increasingly mobile society, not all court-appointed guardians live in the same state as the person to which they are assigned. Differences in states' adult guardianship laws and limited communication between states and courts create a barrier to addressing end of life issues. Adult guardianship jurisdiction issues commonly arise in situations involving snowbirds, transfer of guardianship and long-distance caregiving. Uniform Adult Guardianship in Wisconsin would

simplify the process for resolving a jurisdictional adult guardianship issue – allowing cases to be settled more quickly, and provide more predictable outcomes. This bill allows Wisconsin courts to communicate with other courts when a jurisdictional issue arises.

LRB 4206 Alzheimer's and Dementia Awareness Grant (Rohrkaste): A common theme surrounding Alzheimer's and dementia is a lack of awareness. Many Wisconsinites don't know that they or their loved one is living with one of these diseases, and if they do know, many don't know where to turn. There are many governmental and private resources throughout the state for those living with these diseases and their caregivers. These organizations offer different forms of assistance, but many of our fellow Wisconsinites are not aware of all options. LRB 4206 directly addresses this problem by allowing DHS to distribute up to \$500,000 in grants to community programs across the state to raise awareness for Alzheimer's and dementia resources. By raising awareness, we are hoping to catch these diseases sooner in those living with them and also to raise awareness for caregivers, co-workers, friends, and family about the resources available to them when caring for a loved one.

LRB 3916 Virtual Dementia Tours (Tittl): This bill increases funding to the Department of Health Services by \$50,000 on a one-time basis to purchase virtual dementia tour licenses so virtual tours can be made available at various locations throughout the state.

A virtual dementia tour involves wearing a headset, watching a computer screen and performing various tasks as requested during the tour. At the end of the tour, a person gains a better understanding of what it is like to have dementia and struggle with routine matters. Following that experience, people often remark that the tour was an eye-opening and helpful experience.