

Rep. Taylor: Legislators circulate critical bipartisan bill to ensure safety of communities and those experiencing mental health crisis

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Madison, Wisconsin — Today, Sen. Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton), Sen. Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon), Rep. John Spiros (R-Marshfield), and Rep. Chris Taylor (D-Madison) circulated LRB 3297/4280, which requires the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to allow law enforcement agencies to transport individuals for emergency detention or involuntary commitment to either Mendota Mental Health Institution (MMHI) or Winnebago Mental Health Institution (WMHI), whichever is the most convenient. In 2014, DHS announced a policy change that currently only allows law enforcement agencies to take those suffering a mental health crisis to WMHI, without regard for their location in the state. The bill also requires DHS to expand emergency beds statewide with a grant program.

“This is truly an emergency situation for law enforcement agencies and those suffering from a mental health crisis,” said Sen. Erpenbach. “Not only is it expensive and risky to have our officers out of their communities for long periods of time, but it is also harmful to have someone in a mental health crisis handcuffed in the back of a squad car for hours.”

“This legislation is especially crucial for smaller communities who may only have one officer on duty at a time,” stated Rep. Spiros. “We have heard from law enforcement agencies who have indicated their communities are literally without

services while they are transporting those in crisis across the state.”

“This bill makes a pragmatic change to save law enforcement time and resources, and puts us on a path to have more resources available on a regional basis,” said Sen. Petrowski.

The availability of emergency detention beds is a statewide issue and sometimes neither MMHI nor WMHI are convenient for Wisconsin communities. The bipartisan proposal also requires DHS to collaborate with hospitals to develop a grant program to establish regional mental health crisis centers for emergency detentions.

“This bill recognizes it’s critical that we collaborate with local communities to develop a long term solution to Wisconsin’s mental health crisis,” said Rep. Taylor. “I’m so excited to be a co-sponsor of LRB 3297/4280, which addresses this critical need from both a law enforcement and mental health perspective.”

The deadline for co-sponsoring LRB 3297/4280 is Friday, December 15th.