

Sen. Shilling: Democratic leaders discouraged by limited response to opioid epidemic

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MADISON, WI – As the Senate adopted a package of bills to address the opioid epidemic, community advocates and Democratic lawmakers argued the proposals don't go nearly far enough. Efforts to expand access to mental health and drug treatment services, invest in preventive health care and improve rural health care access were rejected by Republican legislators on the Senate floor.

"After years of Republican budget cuts to prevention efforts, the opioid epidemic has spiraled out of control," said Sen. Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse). "These bills simply don't go far enough to address the root of the problem. After years of struggles, we're taking baby steps when we should be making major strides to improve outcomes and strengthen community safety."

Local leaders, law enforcement officials and community advocates have urged lawmakers to approve additional funding and a more comprehensive plan to address mental health and substance abuse challenges. Democratic amendments to increase rural access to treatment, expand health care coverage and improve treatment services were rejected by the majority party.

"The opioid epidemic has devastated families and communities across our state," added Shilling. "We are past the point of pilot programs and trial balloons. We know what works to reduce drug abuse and we need immediate solutions to overcome this crisis. It's unfortunate that these limited measures are all the majority party is

willing to do when there is so much more that is needed.”

Funding cuts in recent years have hampered drug abuse and prevention efforts in Wisconsin. The 2011-13 budget approved by Republican lawmakers and signed into law by Gov. Walker eliminated the successful Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) grant program which provided grants to address alcohol and drug abuse among school-age children. That decision has resulted in a \$26 million cut to drug abuse prevention efforts across Wisconsin communities.