

# Senate passes last 2 special session bills to combat opioid abuse

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The Senate signed off on two bills designed to combat the state's heroin problem, including one that would add new protections from prosecution for those who overdose and are helped by good Samaritans, so long as they meet certain requirements.

The state previously approved protections from prosecution for those who seek help for someone overdosing to encourage them to call for help. Special session AB 3 would extend those protections for good Samaritans so their parole or probation is not revoked for providing aid to someone they believe have overdosed.

For the person who overdosed to be immune from revocation, the person would have to complete a treatment program as a condition of parole, probation or extended supervision. If such a program is not available or financially prohibitive, the person would have to agree to spend at least 15 days in a county jail.

If the person who overdosed is subject to criminal prosecution for possession, the DA would have to offer the person deferred prosecution that includes completion of a treatment program.

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The bill includes a three-year sunset so the impact can be studied. It passed the chamber on a 32-1 vote, with Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, voting against.

Under special session AB 5, the Department of Health Services would have to establish a comprehensive and coordinated program for the treatment of those suffering from drug dependence.

Prior to voting on the last bill, Dems, including Sen. Janet Bewley, touted an

amendment to the bill that would have authorized the attorney general to “take action” against pharmaceutical companies that she says have overprescribed drugs.

“This is not an attempt to end this work by placing blame but merely by saying we must engage every aspect of this problem, and that we must ask our attorney general to determine the extent to which our pharmaceutical companies can be held accountable,” the Ashland Dem said.

But Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said the amendment wasn’t necessary today.

“The class action is coming, it’s just a matter of time,” he said.

The amendment was shot down on a 20-13 party-line vote.

Both bills now go to the gov’s desk. They’re the final two from this session’s package of HOPE bills, a series of bills to combat heroin and opioid addiction in Wisconsin.