

Sen. Cowles: Assembly votes to protect children from neglect

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MADISON- Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after 2017 Assembly Bill 355, authored by Senator Cowles and Representative Cody Horlacher (R-Mukwonago), was passed by the Assembly during today's floor session:

"Study after study has concluded that children exposed to abuse or neglect are at a greatly increased risk for future emotional or behavioral problems, including alcoholism, drug abuse, high-risk sexual behaviors, eating disorders, obesity, and depression. In 2015, there were over 3,000 substantiated reports of child neglect in Wisconsin, but because of gaps in our current system, children are often forced to stay in neglectful situations for months before they receive help.

"I've authored this bill to try and combat this problem by closing the loophole that puts these kids at risk and protecting more vulnerable children from repeated acts of neglect and drug-endangered environments. AB 355 is not designed to create more criminals, and it does not override the ability of Child Protective Services to improve the situation, but instead it serves as a barrier to protect the child if other systems fail. I would like to thank my co-author, Representative Horlacher, and Attorney General Brad Schimel for their work on this bill."

2017 Assembly Bill 355 reforms Wisconsin's neglect statutes to add substance and clarity for law enforcement, prosecutors, social workers, community leaders, and caretakers. Under current law, prosecutors are required to prove that there was intent to neglect a child, a standard which is inherently contradictory. AB 355 changes the standard to 'negligently failing to act' while adding language to combat

the issues of repeated acts of neglect and subjecting a child to a drug endangered environment.