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U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Baldwin's bipartisan measure to support rural communities included in Senate farm bill

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Reauthorization of first responder grants includes funding for naloxone to help combat opioid abuse

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Senate version of the 2018 Farm Bill that passed with overwhelming bipartisan support last week included a key reform from U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin to support rural emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in training staff and purchasing equipment, including the opioid overdose-reversing drug naloxone. The House and Senate will now reconcile their versions of the Farm Bill before sending a final bill to the President to be signed into law.

"Rural communities have been hit hard by the opioid epidemic and we need to do all we can to make sure our first responders have the resources they need to help save lives," said Senator Baldwin. "No first responder should be unable to save a life because they don't have what they need. That is why I worked to include this critical reform into the Senate Farm Bill to make naloxone and other critical equipment and resources more accessible and affordable."

In May, Senator Baldwin helped introduce the bipartisan Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Act, led by Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Pat Roberts (R-KS), that would reauthorize annual competitive grant funding through the Health

Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to support rural EMS agencies in training and recruiting staff, conducting courses to satisfy certification requirements and purchasing equipment—for everything from naloxone and first aid kits, to power stretchers or new ambulances. Providing additional resources to rural EMS agencies would also help support local governments throughout Wisconsin that are facing the growing costs of emergency services.

A recent decline in primary care and hospital service availability, great distances between health care facilities and low insurance reimbursement for transport and emergency treatment have all strained rural EMS agencies. At the same time, EMS agencies today are tasked with ever-greater responsibilities, including responding on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. These first responders are often the only health care providers in their area and face difficulty in personnel recruitment and retention, and securing expensive equipment.

Along with Senators Baldwin, Durbin and Roberts, Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) also cosponsored the SIREN Act, which was incorporated into the Senate Farm Bill by the four Senators last week.

The SIREN Act is supported by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.