

# Assembly approved pre-existing conditions bill; Evers says doesn't go far enough

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The Assembly today passed a bill that would provide state protections to those with pre-existing conditions after adding an amendment GOP authors said “mirrors” the Affordable Care Act’s protections to bar annual and lifetime caps.

Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz slammed the legislation, which cleared 76-19 on a bipartisan vote after four hours of debate, as “a Band-Aid at best.”

“You can’t say you support repealing the ACA, you can’t say you support staying in the lawsuit to repeal the Affordable Care Act, but then come here and campaign and say, ‘but we support protecting pre-existing conditions,’” said Hintz, who backed the bill on final passage.

GOP members acknowledged that the bill was far from perfect, but called it “an important first step.”

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“Maybe it’s a Band-Aid, but a Band-Aid is a step in the right direction,” said Rep. Adam Neylon, R-Pewaukee.

Gov. Tony Evers pushed for changes to the bill in a meeting with GOP legislative leaders last week, including the language added under the amendment to eliminate annual and lifetime caps, and the chamber backed the amendment 75-20.

But an Evers spokeswoman said the gov was disappointed GOP lawmakers didn’t also add an amendment guaranteeing coverage of essential benefits such as maternity and newborn care. She accused Republicans using the bill to “gut our

healthcare system.”

“The governor will review any amendments to the bill that are passed by the Legislature, but doesn’t support Republican efforts to enshrine into state law lesser benefits for fewer Wisconsinites,” said spokeswoman Melissa Baldauff.

Democrats also introduced three amendments to the bill, none of which were adopted.

Two of the amendments — which would have allowed AG Josh Kaul to withdraw from the federal Affordable Care Act lawsuit and expanded the scope of essential health benefits to the level that Evers requested — were ruled as not germane.

A third — which directed the state Department of Health Services to develop a plan for affordable insurance should the ACA be found unconstitutional — was tabled along party lines.

The bill would have to clear the Senate before it could head to Evers, and Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said he wasn’t sure if his caucus backed the amended bill because members hadn’t yet met to discuss it.

Fitzgerald added Evers’ concerns about the amendments complicated the debate.

“Vos and I kind of walked out of there thinking, ‘I don’t know what he’ll sign,’ and I think we still don’t know what he’ll sign, so it’s pretty hard to negotiate against that,” Fitzgerald said.