

Assembly signs off on suicide prevention package

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The Assembly late this evening passed a series of bills stemming from recommendations made by the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention.

The hours-long scheduled debate focused mainly on gun violence bills brought forth by Gov. Tony Evers for a special session mandated for 2 p.m. today.

Dems blasted Republicans for bringing forth suicide prevention bills without addressing gun violence.

But Republicans shot back, saying the bills they put forth would make a difference and would actually pass the legislature.

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Debate on the package themselves largely centered on AB 527, a measure that would have provided voluntary firearm storage and programs for gun shop owners to go through suicide prevention training, but an amendment stripped out the latter proposal.

The Assembly allotted two hours of debate for this bill alone.

"By not taking up gun safety measures ... Republicans again are failing the people that they represent." Rep. Shelia Stubbs, D-Madison, said today in a floor speech while calling on the Assembly to take up the special session called by the gov.

But Assembly Speaker Robin Vos fired back, saying the gun violence bills brought forth by the gov were nonstarters. And that the Marquette University Law School Poll cited frequently by the gov, that 80 percent of Wisconsinites support legislation on expanding firearm background checks, wasn't a strong enough basis for drafting

legislation.

“As if the way we run government is by taking a poll and doing whatever the poll says,” Vos said. “The poll that actually matters is on election day.”

AB 527 passed 92-2.

AB 525 would add two new positions with the Department of Health Services to construct a suicide prevention program in the state.

“They’re not gonna solve the problem but they can help prevent the problem from getting worse,” Rep. Jim Ott, R-Mequon, said on the series of bills. The former schoolteacher said he saw many students in his 35-year career in education in need of mental health services and it’d make a difference if there were just more professionals available for help.

The bill passed 93-2. The Dem lawmaker who opposed the measure said it didn’t go far enough.

“They’re shy \$50 to \$60 million just to get us to the minimum of what’s needed,” said Rep. Jonathan Brostoff, D-Milwaukee.

AB 526 would require at least two hours of continuing education on suicide prevention for physicians, psychologists, counselors and social workers when they apply to renew their license for the first time.

The measure received criticism from multiple professionals in the healthcare community in public hearing. Doctors and social workers warned this could be “a slippery slope” of governments requiring professionals to study topics over the doctors themselves and the medical boards deciding the best possible continuing education.

“We’re asking the very people whose job it is to help people with depression and suicides and we’re deciding for them they need two hours of training for something they’ve had a lifetime of training for and do every day,” Rep. Deb Kolste, D-Janesville, said on the floor.

Still, the bill passed on floor vote 56-39.

A series of bills from the package passed 92-3. They include:

*AB 528, which would require the Department of Public Instruction to establish a grant program for students who support peer-to-peer suicide prevention programs in public, private and tribal high schools. DPI may award each school up to \$1,000 each year for up to three years when they establish a suicide prevention program. Schools that already have such programs would be eligible for grants, too. But under the bill, new schools would receive priority for the grant money.

*AB 529, which would create grants to the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Center.

*AB 530, which would provide grants for suicide prevention programs in cities, villages, towns and counties.

The final bill from the package, AB 531, would require all student ID cards to have suicide prevention phone numbers printed on them. The bill passed by voice vote.