

# **GOP lawmakers push bill to allow pharmacists to prescribe birth control pills**

Posted on Thursday, Aug 15, 2019

A trio of Republican lawmakers pushed a GOP backed-bill Wednesday that would expand access to contraception by allowing pharmacists to prescribe birth control pills.

Reps. Joel Kitchens of Sturgeon Bay and Mary Felzkowski of Irma and Sen. Kathy Bernier of Chippewa Falls touted the bill's dual benefits: cutting the high public cost of unplanned pregnancies while addressing the "intergenerational cycle of poverty" perpetuated by lack of access to birth control.

In a public hearing before the Assembly Health Committee, Kitchens cited statistics showing nearly two-thirds of unplanned births in the state are publicly funded, costing taxpayers \$313.5 million dollars per year in federal and state tax dollars. He also highlighted the myriad of additional costs of unplanned pregnancies, ranging from poor success in school to the negative impact on the child's health and well-being.

"Knowing all of these sobering facts, we should not be putting up artificial barriers that deny women more choices when it comes to reproductive healthcare," the Sturgeon Bay Republican said.

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

At the heart of the matter, all three said, was a lack of access to contraceptives.

When birth control pills were first introduced to the market, they contained much higher doses of hormones, specifically estrogen and progestin, than needed to prevent pregnancy. This increased the severity and likelihood of negative side-

effects and necessitated consultation with a doctor.

But Kitchens said modern birth control pills had far lower hormone levels and noted the medical community broadly claim oral contraceptive pills are no more dangerous than ibuprofen. He added three prominent medical groups — the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Medical Association — agreed that birth control pills should be available over the counter, though the authority to make such a change lies with the federal Food and Drug Administration.

As such, the trio felt the best way to boost access to contraceptives was to allow pharmacists to write prescriptions.

While Kitchens played up the potential savings in tax dollars, Bernier focused on lower costs for young women who may struggle to get an appointment to see a doctor due to a lack of health insurance or the state's shortage of doctors specializing in obstetrics and gynecology.

"This is going to be extraordinarily helpful for the cost involved and the time involved for young women to take care of their reproductive health," she said.

The bill faced pushback from both sides of the aisle during the hearing.

Reps. Chuck Wichgers, R-Muskego, and Dave Murphy, R-Greenville, expressed concerns ranging from the language used in the testimony — which drew a sharp back-and-forth between Wichgers and the three GOP co-authors — to the safety of the contraceptive. Murphy noted the pill is a known class one carcinogen for breast, cervical and liver cancers.

Kitchens countered health officials told him the potential increased risk of cancer was "very, very tiny" and said alcoholic beverages and working the late shift were also known class-one carcinogens.

Dems on the panel expressed disappointment that a more expansive birth control access bill authored by Rep. Melissa Sargent, D-Madison, was not brought up for hearing as well. Unlike the GOP proposal, the Dem bill did not place an age restriction on those seeking birth control from a pharmacy and allowed pharmacists to prescribe a wider range of contraceptives, among other things.

Quizzed on those two proposals by Rep. Deb Kolste, D-Janesville, Kitchens said he

believed his bill's age limit of 18 years old was necessary to get buy-in from his colleagues.

"There are too many people that have concerns about removing parents from this so I do not think that politically it would pass if it did not have an age limit on it," he said.

Kitchens added that he spoke with Sargent and indicated that he was open to a friendly amendment to add vaginal rings and injectable contraceptives to the bill "if the medical community supported the safety of those types of birth control." But he said the medical professionals he consulted with were not as comfortable with those two forms of contraception as they were with birth control pills.

See the GOP bill:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab304>