

Katzenmeyer campaign: Bipartisan bill to end sexual assault kit backlog crisis remains unheard

Posted on Thursday, Feb 13, 2020

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MADISON, WI — A hearing for a bill that would prevent backlogs of sexual assault kits remains unheard after months of inaction. It is withheld by the chair of the Wisconsin State Assembly Committee on Health, Representative Joe Sanfelippo (R-New Berlin). AB 214, the bill in question, has bipartisan support and would create new procedures and regulations for the timely processing of future kits. The bill has already passed in the Senate.

AB 214 is a response to a 2014 audit that found over 7,000 backlogged sexual assault kits in the state of Wisconsin. Since then, millions of dollars worth of grants have been used to start processing the kits while legislators have faced pressure to ensure swift justice for future victims of sexual assault. AB 214, a bipartisan bill, was introduced in May of 2019 and has still not been heard, despite a promise made by Rep. Sanfelippo to do so last December. The bill has bipartisan support with authors from both parties and over 50 cosponsors in total, and has already passed through the Senate.

Instead, Rep. Sanfelippo decided on a hearing for a different bill, AB 844, which was passed in the Assembly yesterday. Although some Republicans in the chamber pointed out some similarities between AB 844 and its predecessor when introducing it a few weeks ago, the fast tracked legislation has been widely criticized by the victims advocacy groups as having too many loopholes, few regulations, and no statutes as the previous bill did. AB 844 was given a hearing six days after it was introduced and rushed to the floor of the Assembly with few co-sponsors. The intention of AB 844 is to kill AB 214 without the political consequences of denying justice to victims of sexual assault.

Jessica Katzenmeyer, who is running to unseat Rep. Sanfelippo has volcalized her support to survivors who have yet to have their kits processed.

“Today, my heart feels for the victims of sexual assault living in the 15th Assembly District and across Wisconsin. I call out Rep. Sanfelippo today if he truly supports the victims of sexual assault and wants to truly represent the people of the 15th Assembly District, to give AB 214 the hearing it deserves for the benefit of the victims. It is disturbing to see victims of sexual assault being held hostage and further fall victim to these political games. This is irresponsible legislating at a new low.”