

Ballweg joins Dem colleagues in committee vote against transgender athlete bills

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GOP state Sen. Joan Ballweg joined two of her Dem colleagues in voting against bills that would ban transgender students who were born male from competing in girls' and women's sports in high school and college.

The Markesan Republican told WisPolitics.com in a phone interview she opposed the bills for two reasons. One, she believed the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association and the NCAA should be allowed to address the issue on their own.

Two, she cited her work as chair of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention while she was in the Assembly last session. She noted transgender youth are at significantly higher risk for depression, suicide and victimization compared to their peers.

"The whole concept of supporting those individuals as they address their individual sexuality is something that is an overriding concern outside of athletics," Ballweg said.

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There has been a national move by GOP lawmakers to take up similar bills. Idaho last year became the first state to approve such a ban. That law is now being challenged in federal court.

The Human Services, Child and Families Committee voted by paper ballot with both bills emerging from committee on 2-3 votes.

Bills that receive negative votes in committee can still be taken up on the floor.

Ballweg also joined Dem Sens. Melissa Agard, of Madison, and LaTonya Johnson, of Milwaukee, in voting against legislation that would ban UW System and UW Hospitals and Clinics employees from performing or assisting in the performance of an abortion.

During the public hearing on the bill, UW officials raised concerns the proposed restriction would impact the accreditation of their gynecology program. Ballweg said there was conflicting information about that argument, but it remained a concern. She also noted OB-GYN students can opt out of the abortion training.

The committee also voted 3-2 along party lines to back SB 261 that would add new reporting requirements on abortions performed in Wisconsin. The amended version the committee approved includes information such as the reason a woman sought an abortion and the type of contraception the woman was using before the pregnancy and abortion.