

Rep. Kitchens: Introduces birth control legislation

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MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens, R-Sturgeon Bay, has introduced legislation that aims to increase access to birth control and reduce unplanned pregnancies, which can have a considerable impact on mothers, their families and society as a whole.

Under current state law, hormonal birth control is only available through a prescription from a physician or an advanced practice nurse who has met the required qualifications. Rep. Kitchens' bill would, under specific circumstances, allow pharmacists to prescribe hormonal contraceptive patches and self-administered oral hormonal contraceptives – including common birth control pills.

“By policy, prescription drugs are so deemed because they either have high abuse potential or potentially harmful side effects that require a physician’s oversight,” Rep. Kitchens said. “Neither of those conditions apply to these products. While any pharmaceutical can have undesirable side effects in certain individuals, today’s birth control formulations are as benign as most over-the-counter medications. Because of what we now know, it is inadvisable to keep these artificial barriers intact that prevent women from being able to responsibly obtain birth control.”

The practice of pharmacists prescribing birth control is supported by all of the major health organizations, including the American Health Association and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Prior years of research and a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that increasing access to and the use of effective contraceptives can reduce unintended pregnancies. According to the latest available statistics, nearly half of all pregnancies in Wisconsin and across the nation are unplanned, with state and federal taxpayers spending \$21 billion annually on related medical

care. Almost 63 percent of unintended births in Wisconsin are publicly-funded and cost taxpayers \$314 million a year.

Under the proposed legislation, women who are seeking to obtain birth control from a pharmacy must participate in a self-assessment questionnaire and undergo a blood pressure screening administered by a pharmacist. If there are any red flags, the pharmacist can then refer the patient to their physician. Only women who are 18 years of age or older will be able to get a prescription from a pharmacist.

Rep. Kitchens' legislation, known currently as LRB-0840, is identical to his bill that was passed last session by the state Assembly by a vote of 82-13. It could not receive a vote in the Senate because that governing body's last floor session in March was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.