

Senate sends opioid settlement bill to Evers

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Senators today nearly along party lines passed a bill that would give the GOP-controlled Joint Finance Committee final say over opioid lawsuit settlements.

AB 374 puts in place guidelines on how the state should handle lawsuit settlements from opioid manufacturers. It would also require 30 percent of the settlements to go to state coffers, with the remaining 70 percent split between local governments.

The bill passed the Legislature's upper chamber 19-11 and now goes to Gov. Tony Evers' desk. No lawmakers spoke ahead of the vote.

Dem Sen. Lena Taylor, of Milwaukee, broke with Dems and joined the majority in supporting the bill.

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Assembly lawmakers yesterday passed the bill 60-38.

Dem AG Josh Kaul in a statement said he opposes the bill as it unconstitutionally transfers executive branch authority over to the legislative branch through the involvement of the Joint Finance Committee.

"AB374 unnecessarily adds uncertainty to potential opioid-related settlements," Kaul said. "I support the idea of passing good legislation ensuring that Wisconsin recovers as much as possible and allocating a large part of Wisconsin's share of those settlements to local governments. But the bill being rushed through the legislature isn't good legislation and it shouldn't become law."

Kaul in 2019 joined a multi-state lawsuit against opioid manufacturers alleging they're responsible in part for the deadly opioid epidemic which has rocked the

nation. While settlement totals are still unknown, officials in the bill's public hearing suggested it will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars and that payments should start coming in later this summer or in fall.

An Evers spokeswoman didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Read the bill:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/related/proposals/ab374>