

Sen. Taylor, Rep. Ortiz-Velez: Recognize International Overdose Awareness Day

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MILWAUKEE – State Senator Lena C. Taylor (D-Milwaukee) and State Representative Sylvia Ortiz-Velez (D-Milwaukee) released the following statement regarding Drug Overdose Awareness Day:

“Today, on National Overdose Awareness Day, I am marching to celebrate legislative victories to address substance abuse and overdose deaths. While reflecting on the family, friends, and neighbors, we have lost during this period of historically high drug related deaths, today is also a time to recognize all the work that remains to prevent further overdoses in Wisconsin” said Rep. Ortiz- Velez.

“As a staunch advocate for drug reform and life-saving overdose intervention, I was excited to see Gov. Tony Evers sign legislation to legalize Fentanyl testing strips. Fentanyl test strips help people test for the presence of fentanyl – a dangerous additive that results in the death of over 150 people every day. Test strips work in under 5 minutes, and making them accessible could be the difference between life and death for many. I have proudly advocated for the legalization of fentanyl testing strips for much of my time in office, and I helped to pass a resolution in 2021 with the support of first responders, community leaders, and state officials to show our support. Additionally, during my time on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, we were able to lower the fine for marijuana possession to \$1, allowing us to focus more on drugs that do real harm to our community” Ortiz- Velez continued.

Sen. Taylor, who worked alongside her Milwaukee colleague, to address the issue of Fentanyl strip decriminalization, stated “While I am frustrated that roughly \$31

million dollars hangs in the balance, as GOP members of the Joint Committee on Finance decide what's an acceptable use of dollars provided by the Biden Administration to fight the opioid crisis in this country, I am glad we were able to get significant legislation done in this year to deal with substance abuse and drug overdoses. Yet, everyday these funds sit unused, someone is spiraling out of control in drug addiction.”

Ortiz-Velez concluded “There is still much more work that must be done to prevent drug overdoses. In 2021, I helped introduce legislation that would create methamphetamine addiction treatment grants to help individuals suffering from addiction get the support they need. I also advocated for the expansion of medication-assisted treatment for those in need of medical intervention. Unfortunately, my GOP colleagues in the legislature never gave these bills public hearings. Despite this setback, we must continue the lifesaving work on this issue that affects so many Wisconsinites.”