

Sen. Wanggaard: Bill introduced to ensure police & fire aren't denied health insurance

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MADISON – Senator Van Wanggaard (R-Racine) today unveiled a bill to ensure that public safety employees are able to maintain health insurance coverage. The bill, which already has bipartisan support, aims to correct a Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC) ruling stating that municipalities do not have to offer public safety employees health insurance.

“Public safety employees put their health and their lives at risk every day, and the Legislature would never put their health coverage at risk,” said Wanggaard. “It’s hard to believe that a single commissioner in a single case could jeopardize health coverage for thousands of police officers, fire fighters and EMTs, but here we are.”

The WERC ruling this past summer was borne out of negotiations between Racine Mayor Cory Mason’s Administration and the associations representing Racine police officers and Racine fire fighters. When the associations challenged Mason’s efforts to deny health care coverage to certain public safety employees, WERC misinterpreted Wis. Stat. § 111.70(4)(mc)6 stating a “City [has] discretion to determine whether it will even have a health insurance plan for public safety employees.” As a result, health insurance coverage to public safety employees across the

state is at risk. This bill clarifies the existing statute regarding health care plans for public safety employees by specifying that existence of health care coverage, and who is covered by that coverage, is subject to bargaining between a municipality and public safety employees.

“For years, I have fought to ensure that families of fallen officers have health

insurance. I have fought for PTSD coverage for public safety employees and more. If the WERC ruling is allowed to stand these laws will be meaningless,” said Wanggaard. “Apparently, I have to clarify legislative intent to ensure these laws are beneficial for those that put their lives on the line. And I’m glad I already have bipartisan support to do so.”

The bill is being circulated for co-sponsorship until next Friday, March 3rd .