

Assembly sends postpartum expansion, breast cancer screening bills to Evers

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Wisconsin would join 48 other states in providing 12 months of coverage to postpartum women on Medicaid after Assembly Speaker Robin Vos relented and allowed the bill to come to a floor vote.

Despite his past opposition, Vos joined the majority as the bill was approved 95-1 with Rep. Shae Sortwell, R-Two Rivers, the sole no vote.

The chamber also unanimously approved expanded breast cancer screenings after Vos had made moves that some interpreted as an effort to kill legislation that passed the Senate 32-1 earlier this session.

Both bills now head to Gov. Tony Evers.

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The Senate has approved the postpartum bill 32-1 in back-to-back sessions. But it didn't get a committee hearing or floor vote in the Assembly in the 2023-24 session as Vos dismissed it as an expansion of welfare.

Wisconsin now covers 60 days of coverage for postpartum women under Medicaid. If Evers signs the bill, only Arkansas will provide less than 12 months of coverage.

Rep. Robyn Vining, D-Wauwatosa, praised the legislation while condemning the chamber for not acting sooner. She honored Wisconsin women who lost their lives in the time before the legislation was passed.

"Wisconsin is set to be the 49th state to pass postpartum Medicaid expansion,"

Vining. “And so the women who have been lost due to this Legislature’s lack of urgency deserve to be honored here today. Moving forward, when we know that policies will save lives, I hope we move forward with urgency.”

Meanwhile co-author Rep. Patrick Snyder, R-Weston, again criticized Dems’ public push to pass the bill ahead of the vote, arguing their actions put the proposal in jeopardy.

“Folks this is not about politics, it’s about people. And I know politics raises her ugly head a lot of times because we’ve got to make clicks, we’ve got to get on the news or whatever else, but this about people,” Snyder said.

The Senate also voted 32-1 to back SB 264, which would eliminate out-of-pocket expenses for supplemental screenings for women with dense breast tissue. Vos earlier this year was noncommittal about bringing the bill to the floor, and it was sent to Assembly Org rather than a standing committee. That was seen as an effort to keep the bill from coming to the floor.

The Assembly approved the legislation 96-0.

The bill has been nicknamed Gail’s Law in honor of late Wisconsinite Gail Zeamer, of Neenah, who died of cancer and had advocated for the legislation to help ensure women with dense breast tissue like herself could detect it early without facing exorbitant costs. Zeamer’s family was present in the gallery for today’s vote.

Ahead of the vote, members from both sides of the aisle shared personal and family experiences with breast cancer and accessing screening services.

Rep. Lee Snodgrass, D-Appleton, related receiving inconclusive results during a mammogram while she worked for the Girl Scouts. Snodgrass told the chamber her insurance wasn’t very good working for a nonprofit and the cost of the supplemental screening had her debating whether to pay for the follow-up test out-of-pocket or purchase new tires for her car.

“I literally had a conversation with my friends, ‘What do you think is safer?’” Snodgrass said.

Assembly Dems yesterday sought proposed amendments to add the postpartum and breast cancer screening legislation to a series of other legislation in an attempt to force votes on the issues after GOP leaders had held up both.

Rep. Barb Ditttrich, R-Oconomowoc, chided Dems for their “tantrum throwing” yesterday, saying the breast cancer screening bill was above such tactics.