



ROBERT BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 60TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Wisconsin State Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Thursday, October 22, 2015**

Thank you Chairman Vukmir and members of the committee for allowing me to testify on SB 306.

The idea for SB 306 originated from the efforts of Ozaukee and Washington counties, who, in their forthcoming fiscal year budget, were looking to save taxpayers \$300,000 by consolidating their health departments. The two counties quickly realized that the equalized valuation funding requirement contained in s. 251.11 of Wisconsin statutes made it difficult to reach an equitable agreement. These costs should be determined by population and not equalized valuation.

In 2003, action was taken by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to encourage counties and cities to form multi-jurisdictional health departments. Counties have not followed suit and to date I believe that only one multiple county health department has been created: Menominee-Shawano.

SB 306 affords counties with greater flexibility in assessing county levy to finance a multiple county health department. This, in turn, allows each county to fund just their share of the cost of services, based on their population.

AB 362 also creates an exemption to s. 251.11 that provides that counties may withdraw at any time by "written notice to its county board of health and the county boards of other participating counties." The formation of a multiple county health department requires significant action on the part of all counties considering consolidation and therefore we are asking for an exemption so that the parties to the agreement may determine a suitable initial term. Statutes would still allow for withdrawal, if necessary, to meet statutory requirements for a Level I health department.

This legislation is a win-win for taxpayers and counties, as it provides a reduction in state public health funding as counties merge services; provides more efficient services; and reduces the county levy for those counties that choose to consolidate services. A conservative estimate of the projected savings indicates approximately \$300,000 in total levy reductions as an initial result of, for example, the creation of an Ozaukee-Washington Public Health Department. Furthermore, counties, under SB 306, could provide similar, if not superior public health services to taxpayers, more efficiently and cost-effectively, through consolidation in forming a multiple county health department.



DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20TH DISTRICT

Senator Vukmir and members of the committee, thank you for your consideration of SB 306, an essential bill that encourages local government consolidation efforts. At a time when health care costs are exploding and more and more strain is placed on our local units of government, it is imperative that the State do everything it can to facilitate the efforts of local governments to provide better services at a lower cost to the taxpayers. This bill does just that.

Specifically, the State already encourages county consolidation of health services. Chapter 251 of the Wisconsin Statutes provides that “a county board may, in conjunction with the county board of one or more other counties, establish a multiple county health department, which shall meet the requirements of [the] chapter.” Wis. Stat. 251.02(3). The leadership in Ozaukee and Washington Counties have proactively taken steps to address the increase in costs for the provision of health services. The county boards in each county overwhelmingly approved resolutions establishing a joint county public health department. According to fiscal estimates calculated jointly by the counties, the cumulative savings to the taxpayers of Washington and Ozaukee Counties surpasses \$300,000 annually.

Unfortunately, during the course of considering these consolidation efforts, the counties identified two key problems that present the potential to significantly undercut the efficacy of the joint efforts. First, Chapter 251 provides that in forming a multiple county health department, a county may withdraw at any time by “written notice to its county board of health and the county boards of other participating counties.” Second, counties that do form a multiple county health department must determine the proportionate cost to each county on the basis of equalized valuation.

Not surprisingly, because of these impediments, Washington and Ozaukee Counties would join Menomonee and Shawano as only the second county health department merger in the State. When the State statutorily encourages consolidation efforts, the least it can do is ensure such efforts are executed in an equitable manner and having the greatest chance of success. Forcing one county to disproportionately bear the cost of a consolidation and allowing either party to withdraw from a consolidation agreement, even for petty political reasons, has the exact opposite effect.

This bill addresses these concerns with two common sense reforms. This bill would allow counties to establish a joint department with an initial minimum period of up to five years. In addition, the bill (as amended) provides the option for local health boards to determine the proportionate levy contribution from each participating county on a per capita basis.

Obviously more counties will take part in consolidation efforts if they can be done in an equitable manner that encourages a real commitment on the part of both parties. State legislators constantly talk about the need for more efficiencies, streamlined services, and smaller government. This bill accomplishes all of these laudable goals. It is encouraging to see local leaders stepping forward with creative solutions to the use of taxpayer resources. When such opportunities present themselves, the State should do everything it can to serve as a partner in such efforts.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Duey Stroebel'.