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**Luther S. Olsen**  
State Senator  
14th District

**TO:** Senate Committee on Health & Human Services  
**FROM:** Senator Luther Olsen  
**DATE:** November 20, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** Testimony in favor of Senate Bill 504.

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Thank you Chairman Testin and the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in favor of Senate Bill 504.

This legislation is part of a broader package of bills recommended by the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention. This bipartisan task force was created in March of 2019 and held several public hearings across the state with the objective of evaluating the current resources for suicide prevention and identifying opportunities to target and assist at-risk individuals.

Senate Bill 504 focuses on local mental health organizations. These local organizations provide help and resources to those experiencing mental health issues and suicidal thoughts in our communities. They are the frontline resource for individuals struggling with suicidal thoughts in our local communities.

This legislation seeks to grow the number of local mental health organizations and coalitions throughout Wisconsin by requiring the Department of Health Services (DHS) to award grants to local mental health organizations or coalitions for suicide prevention programming. These grants will help localities start a mental health organization or allow them to strengthen an existing one.

DHS would be appropriated \$250,000 annually to distribute grants to organizations or coalitions, which may include city, village, town, county, or federally recognized American Indian tribe or band in this state, for suicide prevention programming. DHS may award a grant up to \$25,000 in a single fiscal year to an eligible organization or coalition. Any group receiving a grant will be required to match 20% of the grant amount.

Thank you, members. I ask for your support and would be more than happy to answer any questions.



# NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

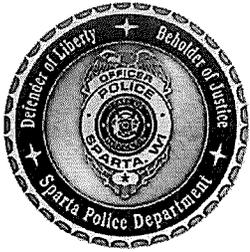
DATE: November 20, 2019

SUBJECT: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 504 and Assembly Bill 530 - relating to grants for suicide prevention programming

Thank you Chairman Testin and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 504 today. This bill would award grants to local mental health organizations for the purpose of suicide prevention. Using the grant money, mental health coalitions and organizations will be able to train teachers, first responders and families about how to assist somebody in crisis and refer them to the appropriate help. Further, the grant money can help organizations implement programs, have sufficient staffing and resources, and more.

This bill is one of the recommendations from the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention, of which I am a member. The Task Force held six public hearings throughout our state, meeting with countless mental health advocates, medical professionals, families and survivors. In listening to mental health professionals and family members of those struggling with suicidal ideation, the need for local support and engagement became clear. All too often, individuals suffering with suicidal thoughts and their families don't know who to turn to or where to seek out help and information. That is why it is so critical to encourage the growth and expansion of local mental health coalitions and organizations. These entities act as a firsthand resource for those struggling with mental health challenges, their family members and communities in general. The resources these organizations offer can include peer-to-peer help, a safe place, training and information for people and families who need a referral for the appropriate mental health care.

On top of that, local mental health organizations help educate communities about mental health. Through this education, the topic of mental health care comes out from behind the shadows, breaking down the stigma that is a barrier for individuals in need of mental health treatment. Mental health organizations hold trainings for schools, local businesses, first responders, law enforcement and the public at large. By bringing awareness to the community, more and more people learn about mental health challenges and how these issues are medical issues, no different than a cold or a broken bone. Allowing this mindset about mental health to



# Sparta Police Department

David Kuderer  
Chief of Police

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November 19, 2019

Chairman Testin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee thank you for allowing me the floor to testify in support of Senate Bill 504 today.

My name is Chief David Kuderer of the Sparta Police Department. I have worked for the Sparta Police Department for 39 ½ years. I have been Chief of Police for the last five years. I have been a member of the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition for the last 7 years.

The Monroe County Mental Health Department did a health assessment in 2012 for all of Monroe County. The Mental Health Coalition was started in 2012, based on the needs identified in the Monroe County Community Health Improvement Plan. The Mental Health Coalition partnered with healthcare providers, law enforcement, human services, united way, Wisconsin Representative Nancy VanderMeer, Ho-Chunk Nation, Monroe county safe communities coalition, Fort McCoy and many other community partners. The coalition's vision is, "Improve mental wellness of Monroe County" and the mission is to, "Improve access to the mental wellness services and reduce stigma across the generations"

The coalition had no funding but the coalition's partners have done a lot of great things to help the residents of Monroe County as follows:

- May is Mental Health Awareness month and the coalition conducts a proclamation signing event with officials from the city of Sparta, Tomah, Fort McCoy, and Monroe County. The event would include a locally known person talking about the stigma of mental health
- A Teen Wellness Day was conducted to provide mental health education to Tomah, Norwalk-Ontario-Wilton sophomores, and students at Sparta SAILS. Education included international mental health speaker Mettie Spiess on suicide prevention. There were sessions on mental health and mindfulness from Gundersen and the UW-La Crosse psychology department. Mettie also did an evening presentation on mental health / suicide prevention to the general public. This event was funded by a grant.
- A Grant provided 325 gun locks for suicide prevention. The locks were handed out during a Fort McCoy Army Substance Abuse program, National Night Out, and June Dairy Days events.
- A Monroe County Health Department employee conducted "Question Persuade Refer"(QPR) training to Cashton High School, Sparta Middle School and local law enforcement officers.
- A Monroe County Health Department employee conducted "Adverse Childhood Experiences" (ACEs) training for area school teachers a year before the training was required by the state.
- Law enforcement officers in Sparta, Tomah and Monroe County were trained on ACEs.
- The coalition worked with the youth mental health focus group in Cashton, so we could better understand how youth handle mental health issues.

- Coalition members attended professional development opportunities related to mental health (i.e. Self-injury Conference; Adolescent Health Symposium, Tomah VA Mental Health Summit)
- Developed and distributed Mental Health Resource Guide to the public.
- Collaboration with school districts for various mental health resources, training, networking and support.
- Coalition members conducted mental presentations to Monroe County Tavern League, Sparta Middle School Wellness Day, Tomah Catalyst, and Monroe County Retired Teachers Association.

Thanks to its dedicated members the coalition has made some improvements in mental wellness in Monroe County without any funding but there is still a lot of work that needs to get done to change the mental health stigma.

Senate Bill 504 will provide the funding needed by coalitions to do the following things:

- I have personally seen how mental health can affect a person and their families. The biggest obstacle is the stigma people have when you mention mental illness. The bad stigma needs to be changed. Changing the mental illness stigma will take time and money because you will have to do a lot of education and make a cultural change in people. If we are able to change the bad stigma around mental illness a greater number of people will not be afraid to ask for help.
- Currently the second biggest problem people with mental illness have is knowing how or where to get help. The coalition would have the funds to develop a community campaign to let people know what services are available and how to access the services.
- The coalition would have funding to train more people to be trainers in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), this would allow more training to be done all over the county thus building a resilient community.
- Coalition would be able to offer training in Monroe County locations so people wouldn't have to spend more money on travel & lodging by going out of county for training.
- This bill would allow us to provide more training to Monroe County citizens in recognizing signs of mental health distress and how to assist people in accessing mental health assistance. To include four school districts, local police departments, EMS, fire departments, hospitals, clinics, business community and Monroe County citizens.
- Coalitions would be able to set up social media sites, work with advertising agencies and the news media to get the information out to the public, so more people get educated on mental health. We can educate a lot of people this way and create a culture & stigma change towards mental health

Senate Bill 504 will make a difference to coalitions and the citizens they serve. Coalitions will have no problem meeting the in-kind match associated with SB-504. I want to thank you for the time you gave me to speak in support of SB-504.

Sincerely,



David Kuderer  
Chief of Police



# Monroe County Health Department

*Serving the Community since 1921*

November 19, 2019

Dear Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Kayleigh Day and I am a Community Health Educator for Monroe County Health Department. As part of my position, I coordinate Monroe County's Mental Health Coalition. The Monroe County Mental Health Coalition started in 2012, based on needs identified in the Monroe County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan. Mental health continues to be one of the top health priorities in Monroe County.

Our coalition's vision is, "Improved mental wellness of Monroe County" and our mission is to, "Improve access to mental wellness services and reduce stigma across the generations." We have a wide range of partners on our coalition, including Monroe County Human Services, Great Rivers United Way, Monroe County Health Department, Tomah Health, cities of Sparta and Tomah Police Departments, Mayo Clinic Health System, Scenic Bluffs Community Health Center, Gundersen Health System, Sparta School District, Tomah VA Medical Center, Fort McCoy, the Ho-Chunk Nation, Independent Living Resources, Wisconsin State Representative Nancy VanderMeer and various other community groups. We come together on a monthly basis to discuss issues related to mental health, strategies for addressing mental health, and to learn what other organizations are doing.

I am speaking today to share how proposed legislation to provide grants to support mental health coalitions can make an impact on the community level.

In order to build and sustain a coalition, having a dedicated staff person is crucial. This person plans, leads, and guides the coalition and evaluates what the coalition has done to know if their work is effective. With tight budgets, many responsibilities, or restrictions on funding, many communities are unable to have a dedicated leader. This funding would help offset those costs for communities across the state.

In Monroe County this funding would create a ripple effect and help us build community capacity to address mental health and suicide and create sustainable change. What I mean by building capacity is providing our community members, professionals, and coalition members with the skills needed to address mental health within their organizations and throughout the community.

Often times many of our staff who are first points of contact for those with mental health conditions or contemplating suicide are social workers, school staff, and law enforcement and



# Monroe County Health Department

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people who work with youth, such as the Boys and Girls Club. It is incredibly difficult for them to travel and take time away for training. With this funding, we could bring in trainings and education to those organizations and help them build their skill sets.

Additionally, organizations that want to create change to better-support people they serve with mental health conditions often have to guide themselves through those processes. This is often done without the proper knowledge, support and on top of their current job duties. For example, we are working toward creating a resilient and trauma-informed community and have a group within our Mental Health Coalition dedicated to advancing that work. Trauma-informed care is an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives. Trauma-informed organizations not only know, and recognize the signs and impacts of trauma, but they also respond by integrating this knowledge into their policies, procedures and practices. Many organizations recognize the impact of trauma but get stuck as to how they can make their organization trauma-informed. No one in our county is trained in how to walk agencies through that process and are often dependent on individuals from other counties to help us, out of their own good will. With this funding we could have someone trained in trauma-informed care to provide support for organizations in our county. Trainings of this type can cost \$2500.

In Monroe County people not only lack access to mental health providers, but they also lack access to informal mental health supports such as support groups. For example, a few weeks ago I had a community member call me. She lost her brother to suicide a few years ago and wanted to be able to do something for others who had lost family members to suicide. Research shows that people who have lost people close to them to suicide, commonly referred to as suicide survivors, are also at an increased risk of dying by suicide. She wanted to know if there were any events happening or how she could go about setting up a support group. The only option I had for her was to join our coalition and come talk with others to see how she could go about doing that. In November, there was a training through the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention for Suicide Bereavement Support Group Facilitator Training in Green Bay. This was a two-day training on the other side of the state, costing \$175. Additional expenses would have included overnight stay and travel. I had no funds to support her going. With this funding, we could provide trainings like that in our county or send community members to those trainings.

I am proud of the work our coalition has done. While many coalitions tend to lose membership over time, we've seen an increase in membership. Through partnership, advocacy, and education we continue to support each other's organizations and work toward creating a community that supports the mental wellness of residents and reduces stigma over the generations. However, we still have a long way to go. This funding would help us to overcome



# Monroe County Health Department

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some of the barriers that create gaps in education and capacity in our county. I thank you for your time, and please reach out if I can be of assistance in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Kayleigh Day'.

Kayleigh Day, MPH, CHES

Community Health Educator

Monroe County Health Department

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**LIVE UNITED**

November 20, 2019

Dear Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you Chairman Testin and the committee for this opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 504 relating to grants for suicide prevention programming and making an appropriation.

My name is Elizabeth Evans. I am the Community Impact Director at Great Rivers United Way serving the counties of Buffalo, Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon. Through my work at United Way, I coordinate a comprehensive regional needs assessment called Compass. The most recent release of Compass was published in May of 2018. Through our rigorous process of surveying the population, holding focus groups, analyzing secondary data, and holding stakeholder meetings, the people in our region have said that that mental health is a major area of need.

According to the 2017 Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, 53 percent of adults and 34 percent of youth with a mental health disorder are not receiving services to treat their mental health. Even in La Crosse County, where there is a good ratio of population to providers, 48 percent of adults and 29 percent of youth with mental health disorders are not receiving needed treatment. The situation is worse in the rural counties. Without mental health supports, folks can end up feeling isolated and alone. By funding grants for coalition work you can help raise awareness, provide training, and build informal supports throughout whole communities.

I am a citizen of Monroe County and a proud member of the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition. With very few resources, this group has been working hard to reduce the stigma around mental health, educating youth and adults about coping and resources, and working across many sectors of the community to raise awareness and compassion for those who are struggling. The work that Ms. Day has done to train community members in QPR – Question, Persuade, Refer has no doubt had a profound impact. I know personally the importance of being trained.

When my daughter was in high school, she started suffering with depression and anxiety. I could tell she was struggling, but didn't quite know how much. One day she was completely despondent and crying. When I asked her what was wrong, she said she didn't know. Then I remembered the QPR training I went through as an employee at a shelter. I asked her, "Do you feel like harming yourself?" Those words are so hard to say to someone you love, but I am so thankful that I did. Just by asking her that question, she felt like she could share her feelings of self-harm and we were able to get her help. I believe in my heart that QPR saved my daughter's life.

It is work that coalitions do that reaches schools, employers, churches, businesses, service providers, and citizens in building compassionate communities responsive to those who are struggling with mental health. Our strength is our connections. We have done so much already and with even a small grant, we could do so much more.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Evans".

Elizabeth Evans  
Community Impact Director  
Great Rivers United Way