



John Nygren

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 89TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

Wisconsin's Heroin and Opioid Epidemic
State Rep. John Nygren
Friday, April 15, 2016

Thank you Senator Johnson and the members of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for holding a hearing on the impact of trafficking and abuse of heroin and prescription opioids in Wisconsin.

Our country is currently facing a prescription opioid and heroin epidemic. This problem knows no boundaries; all demographics of people are affected in one way or another, no matter their income level, race, or how urban or rural their communities are. Many of us know too well that Wisconsin is no exception to this epidemic. It is for this reason that I am proud of the legislative steps my colleagues and I have taken over the past three years to combat this devastating problem in our state.

In 2013, we began what has become the foundation of Wisconsin's Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education (HOPE) Agenda. This foundation was laid with seven bills that aimed to fight heroin use and addiction in our state. We expanded access to drug treatment opportunities, made opioid antagonists like Narcan more readily available to first responders, and enacted a Good Samaritan law. However, after the 2013-14 legislative session ended, it was clear that there was much more work to be done to combat Wisconsin's heroin and opioid epidemic.

As the 2015-16 session began, we continued our work to build upon the HOPE Agenda. Instead of specifically targeting the devastating effects of heroin, we took the opportunity to focus on what many believe is the root of Wisconsin's heroin epidemic: prescription opioid misuse, abuse, and addiction. Studies show that, in many cases, heroin addiction begins with an addiction to prescription painkillers. Whether these medications are obtained legally or not, we need to do our best to curtail the illegal use of these dangerous substances.

As a continuation of the HOPE Agenda this session, we have passed ten additional bills – nine of which have already been signed into law by Governor Walker. These bills continue to expand access to opioid antagonists to reduce instances of overdose deaths, further expand access to Treatment and Diversion (TAD) programs so people addicted to opioids can get the help they need in lieu of incarceration, and expand the use of Wisconsin's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) so instances of overprescribing become less common. It is our hope that these important pieces of legislation will help reduce the number of people who become addicted to legal prescription opioids and, in turn, reduce the number of people who eventually make the switch to heroin and other dangerous illegal substances.

There are 17 HOPE Agenda bills total, and all 17 of them were approved unanimously by both Houses of the Wisconsin State Legislature. Governor Walker has signed 16 of the proposals into law, and we expect him to sign the final HOPE Agenda bill into law in the near future. It's important to note that this is not a Republican or a Democrat issue, but rather a public health and safety issue. I am proud that there has been such widespread support of these pieces of legislation from people around the state



John Nygren

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 89TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

including the medical community, law enforcement, my colleagues in the legislature, the governor, the attorney general, and countless addiction advocates.

As I mentioned before, the heroin and opioid epidemic knows no boundaries, and now is the time to start combatting this devastating problem. I am proud that Wisconsin is leading the way with efforts like the HOPE Agenda, and I'm confident that other states will be able to look to us for guidance on what can be done nationwide. The laws that make up the HOPE Agenda are not the silver bullet that will solve this epidemic, but each proposal is an important step in the right direction. With that said, I look forward to continuing our work to further build upon the HOPE Agenda in the future.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before your committee today on the HOPE Agenda and the state of Wisconsin's heroin and opioid epidemic. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any comments, questions, or concerns.