



TO: The Honorable Members of the Wisconsin State Senate

FROM: Sara Kohlbeck, PhD, MPH
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Director, Division of Suicide Research and Healing, Comprehensive Injury Center
Assistant Director, PhD Program in Public and Community Health, Institute for Health
and Equity
Medical College of Wisconsin*

DATE: November 9, 2023

RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 527, Related to grants for suicide prevention programming

The Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) supports Senate Bill 527 (SB 527), related to grants for suicide prevention programming, and respectfully requests your support for this important legislation. SB 527 requires the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to award grants of up to \$25,000 to organizations or coalitions of organizations for suicide prevention programming. This legislation is critically important and timely as suicide rates in Wisconsin have continued to rise in the wake of the pandemic.

Enacting SB 527 will ensure the proliferation of evidence-based programming for suicide prevention across Wisconsin. Issuing grants to local organizations and coalitions will allow for the implementation of suicide prevention programming that is relevant to specific communities. Suicide is a complex health issue, and often requires a multi-faceted solution. Therefore, making these grants available throughout the state will help ensure that many of the factors contributing to suicide can be addressed.

MCW's Comprehensive Injury Center's vision is a healthier and safer community for all. Injury is a biopsychosocial disease that presents a lifelong risk of premature death and disability. Unintentional injury is the leading cause of death among individuals ages 1 through 44 in the United States and intentional injury (e.g., homicide and suicide) is a leading cause of death among individuals ages 10 to 34.

The MCW Comprehensive Injury Center and its Division of Suicide Research and Healing provide significant scope and research capability as it relates to suicide prevention. The Division of Suicide Research and Healing currently conducts research related to suicide and suicide prevention across the state with a particular focus on suicide among farmers, veterans, and minoritized groups. We also work extensively with community organizations across the state who are engaging in suicide prevention activities, serving as an academic partner.

From our perspective, this legislation will be transformative in that it will provide much-needed fiscal resources to further suicide prevention in our state. Many organizations have excellent ideas to prevent suicide in their communities but lack resources to implement these strategies. This legislation bridges that gap and will ultimately help save lives in our state.

Thank you for your consideration. MCW respectfully requests your support for this legislation. Please feel free to contact Nathan Berken, Vice President of Government Relations, at 414.955.8588, or nberken@mcw.edu, if you have any questions or would like additional information.