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ROBERT L. COWLES

Wisconsin State Senator
2nd Senate District

Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 298

Senator Robert Cowles

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – September 3, 2019

Thank you, committee members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Senate Bill 298. This bill contains two provisions to require the dissemination of information by the DNR to raise awareness of Lyme disease, inform on how to prevent tick bites, and encourage people to check for ticks after spending time outdoors. Senate Bill 298 was drafted thanks to the recommendations from the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation.

The problem of Lyme disease is growing and shows no signs of slowing. Lyme disease is a bacterial disease transmitted to humans by an infected tick commonly known as the black-legged tick or deer tick. Lyme disease is manageable if caught early, but if left untreated, the infection may spread and produce symptoms that include, but aren't limited to, severe headaches and neck stiffness, pain and swelling in large joints, fatigue, cognitive decline, shooting pains, and heart palpitations.

Lyme disease is the most commonly reported vector-borne illness, which are diseases contracted by humans from animals and usually through a bite, in the United States with an estimated 30,000 Americans diagnosed each year. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2014, nearly 96% of the 25,359 Lyme disease cases are reported from only 14 states in the Northeast and Northern Midwest with 2,975 of these cases (11.7%) reported from Wisconsin. Lyme disease is the highest reported tick-borne disease in Wisconsin, with a total of 38,394 cases reported between 1990 and 2015. In 2017, Wisconsin is the 4th-worst state in the nation for incidence of Lyme disease, and rates are only increasing. Lyme disease is most common in the Northern and Western regions of the state, but is contracted in all regions of the state.



While about a dozen other states have taken actions to address the disease in recent sessions, Wisconsin has fallen behind as rates of Lyme disease has doubled in the last decade and experts at the CDC believe the number of cases may be as much as 10 times higher than what is reported through surveillance. This bill is one of five in a series of small, yet important steps to improve our approach and foster continuing discussions to combat Lyme disease in Wisconsin.

The first provision would require that this information on ticks and Lyme disease be published in informational brochures produced for specific State Parks by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and distributed in park offices. Under this bill, information must only be published in brochures produced after the Act's effective date to prevent the DNR from having to republish existing brochures. Visitors appreciate the information in these handouts. Adding information on Lyme disease in these brochures will better serve these visitors by acting as a reminder of the potential danger posed by ticks and the simple steps visitors can take to prevent getting bitten both in parks and in their own backyards.

The second provision would require the DNR to complete an annual awareness campaign in May of each year, which is Lyme Disease Awareness Month. The campaign would be launched on some combination of existing digital platforms including their website, social media, and e-newsletters, and in print circulations including their magazine. The DNR has a vast online following of avid outdoors-people as demonstrated by the high number of visits to their website, social media followers, and subscriptions to e-newsletters. When addressing the issue of awareness and prevention of Lyme disease, we should look to utilize these platforms in the time of year when awareness and prevention may be most relevant.



Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
SB 298- DNR efforts to raise awareness about Lyme Disease
September 3, 2019

Chairman Cowles and Committee Members -

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 298, which requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to include information related to Lyme Disease on specific state park brochures.

Specifically, under the bill the DNR would be required to include information on how to prevent and check for tick bites while visiting the park. Additionally, the bill directs the DNR to conduct a Lyme Disease Awareness campaign in the month of May which is Lyme Disease Awareness Month.

Data from the CDC, shows that one of the areas where people most commonly get Lyme Disease is in the Northern Midwestern states, especially Wisconsin and Minnesota. According to the DNR, nearly 18 million people visited our state parks in 2018. The heaviest traffic in our parks is also when ticks are most active, from May through September. Having information available in our parks could be extremely important to visitors from outside of Wisconsin who may not be as familiar with ticks and the diseases they can spread.

Last month, the Assembly Environment Committee held a public hearing on some of the bills we're talking about today. The testimony that was shared by individuals and families who are suffering with Lyme Disease was incredibly moving. It was evident that education is extremely important to stop the spread of the disease.

Once again, thank you for holding a hearing on SB 298 today. I'm happy to answer any questions.

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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

2019 Senate Bill 298

DNR Efforts to Raise Awareness about Lyme Disease September 3, 2019

Good afternoon Chairman Cowles and members of the Committee. My name is Missy VanLanduyt, and I am the Section Chief for Recreation Partnerships in the Bureau of Parks and Recreations Management with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 298 (SB 298), which requires the department to include information in DNR produced property brochures as well as requires the Department to raise awareness of Lyme disease annually through a digital and print outreach campaign. We also want to acknowledge and thank the bill authors for reaching out to us and working with the DNR prior to this bill being introduced.

Specifically, this bill would require the Department to include information in property brochures that includes information about Lyme disease, how to prevent tick bites and that visitors are encouraged to check for ticks after visiting the park. Also, under the bill, annually in the month of May, in connection with Lyme Disease Awareness Month, the Department must conduct a digital and print outreach campaign communicating the same information included in the property brochures.

The effort to include information in already produced brochures and create a digital and print awareness campaign will be absorbed through existing program budgets and can be implemented per the timeline outlined in this bill. Lyme disease awareness will be promoted through seasonal property brochures and the already established OutWiGo campaign which promotes health and wellness in the outdoors, as well as through the department magazine.

On behalf of the Wisconsin State Park System and the DNR, thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Testimony of behalf of The Friends of Wisconsin State Parks (FWSP) Supportive of Senate Bills 296, 297, 298, 300

FSWP supports passage of the above senate bills. There are aprox 70 Friends Groups that have donated millions of dollars and thousands of hours of volunteer labor to state lands properties. Many of these properties are in the heart of tick country.

Tick and tick spread diseases are the scourge of outdoor living. You don't have to wander off the beaten path to find them or for ticks to find you! Ticks are now present in every Midwest State and all counties in WI. Ten to fifteen years ago, ticks were rare in the southern WI but that's all changed. Ticks are on the move which is causing an increasingly severe public health threat. Many people are actively outdoors deal with this menace on a regular basis. It's gotten to the point where almost everyone knows someone who has Lyme disease.

Preventing Lyme Disease is not about keeping people from visiting Wisconsin's great outdoors, but instead it's about educating people on how to prevent tick bites, how to search the body for ticks and raising the awareness of the warning signs of Lyme Disease to catch the disease early

The proposed legislation will help Wisconsin deal with this huge health care issue. While over a dozen other states have taken action to combat the Lyme Disease, Wisconsin has fallen behind in addressing the issue, and while we cannot prevent every case, we have a vital need to address Lyme Disease to help the people of our state.

The most dangerous tick species is the female deer or black-legged tick which unfortunately is very common in Wisconsin. Deer ticks represent the gravest threat to humans and companion animals due to their propensity to carry and spread a variety of diseases. They can carry Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, tick-borne relapsing fever, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis and Powassan illness. If caught early most cases are treated successfully with antibiotics. That's why this legislation is so important. Each year, approximately 30,000 cases are reported, according to the (CDC). Recent estimates suggest that approximately 300,000 people get Lyme Disease, only 1/10 cases are reported and many of these evolve into an extensive disease process which can be devastating . That's another reason why this legislation should be passed. Wisconsin is now ranked 4th worst in the country in the prevalence of Lyme Disease.

Ticks are tough animals to deal with. They can spend months off their hosts, without feeding due to their low resting metabolic rates. Then rise from near dead to latch on to a host. Recent evidence indicates that the aggressive Lone Star tick is moving through Illinois and into southern Wisconsin. This is another dangerous tick species that carries a variety of diseases.

The four bills on the agenda Tuesday are part of a larger 5 bill package which are all sorely needed.

By emphasizing awareness, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Lyme Disease through these bills, the Legislature has made a bold first step to fight Lyme Disease and other vector-borne illnesses in our state.

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