

ROBERT L. COWLES

Wisconsin State Senator
2nd Senate District

Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 300

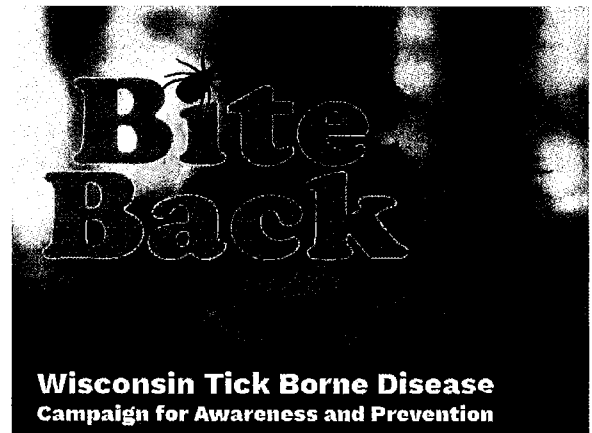
Senator Robert Cowles

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

Thank you, committee members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Senate Bill 300. This bill establishes a study committee with experts from state agencies, the medical profession, local government, and more to provide consensus-based recommendations for policy changes on awareness, prevention, surveillance, diagnosis, reporting, and treatment of Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases.

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.

Senate Bill 300 establishes a sixteen-member, Governor-appointed study committee to create a report for the legislature within 36-months on consensus-based recommendations for policy changes on awareness, prevention, surveillance, diagnosis, reporting, and treatment of Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Some of the topics discussed will include the use of long-term antibiotics by providers, the coverage of long-term antibiotics by insurance providers, and the notification of patients for the increased potential of a false negative test early in the disease's progression.

The members of the study committee would represent diverse viewpoints and experiences related to Lyme disease and would include:

- The Secretary of the Department of Health Services or their designee;
- The Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources or their designee;
- The Commissioner of Insurance or their designee;
- Three health care providers with a background in diagnosing and treating Lyme disease, at least one of which shall be from north of Highway 10;
- Two educators with a background in Lyme disease or other vector-borne diseases;
- One representative based in Wisconsin from the private health insurance industry;
- One administrator or employee in the administration of a Wisconsin hospital;
- Two advocates for Lyme disease policy or residents impacted by Lyme disease, at least 1 of which shall be from north of Highway 10;
- One representative of a nonprofit organization focused on outdoor recreation;
- Two representatives from county health departments, at least 1 of which shall be from a county that is at least in part north of Highway 10, and;
- One representative from a group representing county health departments and boards.

As the other pieces of legislation in this package of bill only represent a first step, there may be other changes that can be made to combat Lyme disease. By creating a venue for people with academic, practical and first-hand knowledge to convene, decision-makers in the Legislature, state agencies, and beyond will have consensus-based recommendations to produce the most effective policies to combat Lyme disease.



Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
SB 300- Establishing a Tick-borne Disease Study Committee
September 3, 2019

Chairman Cowles and Committee Members -

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 300, which establishes a tick-borne disease study committee.

Specifically, the bill creates a Tick-borne Study Committee that would be comprised of the Secretary of Health Services, the Secretary of Natural Resources, the Commissioner of Insurance, and thirteen members appointed by the Governor. The committee would be charged with studying issues involving awareness, prevention, surveillance, diagnosis, reporting, and treatment of Lyme Disease and other tick-borne diseases and submit a report to the legislature within three years.

Tick-borne illness like Lyme Disease is now considered the fastest growing infectious disease in the US and is the most common tick-related disease seen in WI. As you heard in related testimony, in 2018 Wisconsin had over 3,100 estimated cases of Lyme Disease. The average number of cases has more than doubled over the past 10 years. According to the CDC, Wisconsin is one of the states reporting the highest number of cases and in all reality the actual number of cases is probably a lot higher than what is reported.

It's time for Wisconsin to work together on identifying ways we can help address the seriousness of this disease. Establishing this study committee would be great first step.

Once again, thank you for holding a hearing on SB 300 today. I'm happy to answer any questions.



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Andrea Palm, Secretary

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

FROM: Lisa Olson, Legislative Director

DATE: September 3, 2019

RE: 2019 Senate Bill 300, relating to: establishing a tick-borne disease study committee

Chairman Cowles and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 300. The Department of Health Services (DHS) would like to testify for information only on SB 300, which creates a tick-borne disease study committee consisting of the secretaries of health services and natural resources, the commissioner of insurance, and thirteen members appointed by the Governor.

In Wisconsin, the most common illness spread by ticks is Lyme disease. In 2018, Wisconsin had 3,105 estimated cases of Lyme disease. The average number of reported cases has more than doubled over the past 10 years. Fortunately, with education and preparation Lyme disease is preventable and, if treatment starts in the early stages, the disease is treatable with antibiotics.

The Department is supportive of evidence-based efforts to reduce the incidence of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses in Wisconsin and we appreciate the work of the bill authors on this important topic.

We appreciate our agency's inclusion on this study committee as DHS staff members within the Division of Public Health conduct Lyme and tick-borne disease surveillance, control, and prevention efforts statewide, and communicate with academic researchers who are studying vector populations, infection rates, and control methods. While the Department is supportive of the study committee creation, there are a few recommendations we would like to offer to strengthen the proposal.

We would recommend removing "diagnosis" and "treatment" of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases from the study committee's charge. Diagnosis and treatment decisions should be made by the physician and patient, based on the latest scientific evidence, and not dictated by state policy since scientific evidence is not static and can change over time.

We also want to note that while short courses of antibiotics can be used to successfully treat Lyme disease, the extended use of antibiotics (defined as an antibiotic course ordered to be ≥ 5 weeks) for treatment of Lyme disease is not typically recommended by the medical community, based on the lack of proven effectiveness and the potential for serious complications.

Lastly, to address concerns about the interpretation of Lyme disease diagnostic tests, this portion of the bill could be expanded to include the risk of both false negatives and false positives, as well as ways to educate providers on how to interpret these tests, when testing is appropriate, and how to communicate test results to patients.

Thank you again to the bill authors for putting forth this legislation and raising awareness of tick-borne illnesses in the state. If members of the committee have questions surrounding the Department's existing Lyme disease programming or our recommendations for this legislation, please do not hesitate to contact me at 608-266-3262 or lisaa.olson@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

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.

Michael McFadzen mcfadzen@msn.com

Friends of Wisconsin State Parks Policy Chairperson