



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873
Email: fiscal.bureau@legis.wisconsin.gov • Website: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb>

January 16, 2020

TO: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang, Director

SUBJECT: Health Services: Section 13.10 Request to Transfer Funding for Suicide Prevention Grant -- Agenda Item VI

REQUEST

The Department of Health Services (DHS) requests a transfer of \$100,000 GPR in 2020-21 from the Committee's supplemental appropriation under s. 20.865(4)(a) to the DHS grants for community programs appropriation under s. 20.435(5)(bc) in 2020-21 to fund a one-time grant for suicide prevention activities.

BACKGROUND

Prevalence. Suicide is a large and growing public health problem. In a 2018 report describing trends in state suicide rates among persons age 10 and older, researchers funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concluded that suicide rates increased significantly in 44 states between 1999 and 2016, with 25 states experiencing increases of greater than 30 percent. During that period, Wisconsin's age adjusted suicide rate increased from 13.1 to 16.5 per 100,000, or approximately 25.8 percent.

In 2017, there were 47,173 recorded suicides in the United States, the tenth leading cause of death in the country. Many more people consider suicide than die by suicide. The CDC estimates that, nationally, approximately 10.6 million people thought about dying by suicide, 3.2 million people made a plan for suicide, and 1.4 million people attempted suicide in 2017.

In 2017, there were 918 recorded suicides in Wisconsin, the ninth leading cause of death in the state. Of these deaths, 722 were males (79%) and 196 were females (21%). Suicide was the second leading cause of death for Wisconsin residents ages 15 through 34, and the fourth leading cause of death for Wisconsin residents ages 35 through 54. With respect to age groups, in 2017, suicide rates were highest among Wisconsin residents ages 45 through 54.

Suicide rates vary by age, race, ethnicity and other population characteristics. Other populations with significantly higher suicide rates include individuals who reside in rural counties, Native Americans, veterans and other military personnel, and sexual minority youth.

CDC indicates that approximately 54% of individuals who die of suicide do not have a known mental disorder.

Current Suicide Prevention Programs Administered by DHS. The *Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy* is a planning document prepared by the Prevent Suicide Wisconsin (PSW) Planning Committee, which includes staff from state and county agencies, nonprofit agencies, and other experts in the field of mental health and suicide prevention. DHS expects to release an updated version of the report sometime in the spring of 2020.

In 2014, DHS entered into a five-year contract with Mental Health America-Wisconsin (MHA) to implement the state's suicide prevention plan. The contract is funded with federal funds the state receives under the community mental health services block grant (CMHSBG). In federal fiscal year 2018-19, \$224,991 FED was budgeted for the MHA contract. DHS renewed the contract through September, 2020, and indicates that any new contracts, or contract renewals, with MHA will be funded from the federal block grant.

DHS staff represent the Department in PSW steering committee meetings and administer, monitor, and provide technical assistance for the contract with MHA.

2019 Act 9 Provision and Subsequent JFC Action. As passed by the Legislature, the 2019-21 biennial budget bill would have provided \$100,000 GPR in 2019-20 for DHS to provide as a one-time grant to the Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Association, Inc. (WUCMAA), to support suicide prevention activities conducted by the coalition in the 2019-21 biennium. The Governor's partial veto of this provision deleted the reference to WUCMAA. Consequently, under the provisions of Act 9, DHS is required to award a one-time grant in the amount of \$100,000 in fiscal year 2019-20 to support suicide prevention activities conducted in the 2019-21 biennium.

On September 4, 2019, the Committee transferred \$100,000 GPR that was provided in Act 9 for DHS to fund a suicide prevention grant in 2019-20 to the Committee's 2019-20 program supplements appropriation, and specified that this funding would be released for suicide prevention programs for suicide prevention programs, pursuant to the Act 9 provision.

ANALYSIS

In its request, DHS indicates its intent to release a grant funding opportunity announcement (GFOA) and award a grant to an organization that demonstrates its ability to increase awareness of suicide, mental health, and substance use services focused on the Hmong community. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there were approximately 49,200 Hmong persons living in Wisconsin in 2010.

The Department has developed a draft GFOA, and would issue it soon after the Committee approves its request. Grant applicants would require some time to respond to the GFOA, after which

DHS would review each application and award the grant. Based on the timing of the grant award, the additional services would first be provided in 2020-21.

WUCMAA is a nonprofit organization, based in Appleton, with a mission to provide ethnic nonprofit organizations with capacity building, financial resources, and advocacy services. WUCMAA had previously received grant funding from DHS to reduce smoking rates among Hmong communities, and cites, as part of its success, the organization's ability to affect behaviors by sharing information through a close-knit, family-oriented culture. It is possible that DHS would award the grant to an organization other than WUCMAA that can demonstrate that it meets the Department's grant announcement criteria. However, DHS staff are unaware of recent interest expressed by potential grantees.

Several arguments could be made in support of approving the Department's request. First, the proposal is consistent with the provisions of Act 9, which requires DHS to award a \$100,000 grant to fund suicide prevention activities in the 2019-21 biennium. Failure to approve the transfer of this funding in 2019-20 would prevent DHS from implementing the Act 9 requirement.

Second, both the Legislature and the Department proposed targeting prevention services to the Hmong community -- the Legislature, by approving the provision in the enrolled budget bill, and the Department, in submitting this request.

DHS indicates that Wisconsin's Hmong community has been identified as a high-need, at-risk population for suicide, and that some studies indicate a higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts amongst Hmong youth than among other youths. A 2013 youth risk behavioral study indicted a greater proportion of Asian students seriously considered suicide and made suicide plans, compared to other ethnicities, corroborating data found by Dane County in a 2009 survey of Hmong youth regarding suicidal thoughts. DHS notes that Wisconsin has the third highest population of Hmong among U.S. states, and community advocates identify linguistic and cultural beliefs, mental health illiteracy, language, and a lack of peers and trust in providers as specific barriers for Hmong individuals to seek access behavioral health care.

Under the Act 9 provision, the Department and the Committee are not obliged to target suicide prevention services to the Hmong community. If the Committee wishes DHS to consider awarding the suicide prevention grant to an agency that would target other at-risk populations, it could approve the Department's request on the condition that DHS not require the awardee to demonstrate its ability to increase awareness of suicide, mental health, and substance use services focused on the Hmong community. Under this alternative, DHS could still choose to award the grant to an organization that provides services targeted at the Hmong community, but other agencies could apply for the one-time grant funding to support suicide prevention services for other high-risk communities. However, opening the grant opportunity to a larger group of potential applicants would likely result in delaying the Department's contracting decision and implementation of the Act 9 provision.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Department's request.

2. Approve the Department's request, but specify that DHS is not required to award the grant to an entity that demonstrates its ability to increase awareness of suicide, mental health, and substance use services focused on the Hmong community, enabling DHS to award the grant to target suicide prevention activities to other at-risk populations.

Prepared by: Charles Morgan