

Romaine Quinn

State Representative • Serving the 75th Assembly District

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Contact: Rep. Quinn (888) 534-0075

Northwest Regional Mental Health Center Plan Would Provide Savings, Better Access

Madison – Representative Romaine Quinn (R-Barron) joined Northwestern Wisconsin legislators in Chippewa Falls to discuss a proposal by Senator Kathy Bernier (R-Chippewa Falls) for a regional Mental Health & Emergency Detention Facility. A bill circulated by Sen. Bernier would create a one-time \$15 million grant from the Building Commission for the startup costs of renovating existing facilities and training new staff to add 22 new mental health beds at an Eau Claire area hospital.

Rep. Quinn called the project “vital to our community.” He added, “The costs in time and resources for police officers in our area to transport people in the middle of mental health crises to facilities in Oshkosh or Madison are a major drag on our communities’ finances. These beds would represent a major improvement for both law enforcement and mental health in our communities, as well as cost savings.”

Senator Bernier originally advocated for a budget item dedicating funds to the creation of a mental health center for the Northwest region. The motion was passed by the Joint Committee on Finance and passed by both the Assembly and Senate, but was vetoed out of the budget by Governor Tony Evers.

The bill currently proposed by Sen. Bernier would leverage existing facilities to create a sustainable center to service the region. In a memo describing the bill, Sen. Bernier said, “The new and currently existing beds would be split between a 33 adult bed location and a dedicated 18 bed adolescent location nearby. This expansion would dramatically help with the difficulties of transporting individuals under Chapter 51 emergency detention to Winnebago MHI for 29 counties in northern and western Wisconsin. Traveling the 300 plus miles from northwest Wisconsin to Oshkosh can take over five hours each way.”

In 2018, the 29 counties in the region reported 774 cases that required transport of a Chapter 51 patient. Based on this caseload, the proposed facility would offer nearly \$2.8 million in savings. For the counties comprising the 75th Assembly District, the savings would be:

- Barron County: \$134,318
- Washburn County: \$9,620
- Dunn County: \$78,674
- St. Croix County: \$196,682
- Polk County: \$105,536
- Burnett County: \$38,378

For the 25th Senate District, the savings would be \$978,477.

“These numbers are based on a conservative estimate and do not include calculations for overnight stays which often happen on such trips. It is likely that savings could be even greater,” Rep. Quinn noted.

Sen. Bernier is currently seeking co-sponsors for her legislation, before it is assigned to a committee.

“Given the potential impact on communities across our region, I believe that anyone serious about improving mental health access for our area will support this proposal,” said Rep. Quinn. “We often talk about bipartisanship in Madison, and this bill is a perfect opportunity for us all to come to the table to support mental health in rural Wisconsin. I look forward to joining my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to vote to pass this bill soon.”

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