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Firearm Self-Exclusion Program to Prevent, Reduce Suicide in Wisconsin

New legislation would allow persons to voluntarily prevent themselves from purchasing a handgun

MADISON – In recognition of National Suicide Prevention Week, today State Representative Melissa Sargent (D-Madison) announced new legislation aimed at preventing and reducing suicide in Wisconsin. LRB-3529 would create the Firearm Self-Exclusion Program, which would allow persons to voluntarily prohibit themselves from purchasing a handgun in Wisconsin. The bill is modeled after decades-old self-exclusion programs in other states, notably several other Midwestern states including Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa, that have targeted problem gambling.

“Suicide is such a taboo, highly-stigmatized subject in our society,” said Sargent, the lead author of LRB-3529. “Each and every one of us either has been affected ourselves or know someone who has been affected by a suicide loss, but we don’t often talk about those experiences or know how to get help when we need it. LRB-3529 provides an important step in preventing and reducing suicide by allowing people to take proactive steps to keep themselves safe when they’re in crisis.”

LRB-3529 is modeled after self-exclusion programs to combat problem gambling, which allow persons to prohibit themselves from entering casinos or cashing in gambling winnings. The bill requires the Department of Justice to create and maintain a list of persons who want to voluntarily exclude themselves from being able to purchase a handgun in Wisconsin. A person wanting to participate in the Firearm Self-Exclusion Program would simply have to fill out an application and would have the choice of selecting a one-year irrevocable term, or a five-year or twenty-year term with an irrevocable period during the first year.

“Nearly half of the suicides that occur in Wisconsin involve firearms, so folks having the opportunity to voluntarily exclude themselves from future handgun purchases—especially if they are persons who have previously experienced suicidal ideations or tendencies—is a simple solution that will save lives,” Sargent said. “We’re not just raising awareness about suicide, we’re making it socially acceptable for people to take action to keep themselves safe. It’s a win-win.”

The bill is co-authored by State Senator Latonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee), and is currently being circulated for co-sponsorship. The period for co-sponsorship ends on September 22nd.

“This bill is commonsense, and I am hopeful it will have bipartisan support. We’re not taking away anyone’s guns, and we’re not putting anyone on the list involuntarily—it’s strictly about self-selecting into a program to help prevent and reduce firearm-involved suicides in Wisconsin, and that’s something I think everyone can get behind, regardless of the letter behind their name,” Sargent concluded.

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Melissa Sargent is a State Representative in the Wisconsin Assembly, representing the 48th Assembly District, which covers the east and north sides of the city of Madison and the village of Maple Bluff.