

Homeless Wisconsinites Left out in the Cold by GOP

Written by Jon Erpenbach Press. State Senator 27th District
Friday, 06 December 2019 11:41 -



State Republican “A Hand for the Homeless” package just another stall tactic says Erpenbach.

WEST POINT - In Governor Evers' budget proposal, he included funding to combat homelessness in Wisconsin. The funding was based on recommendations from an Interagency Council on Homelessness that was created in 2017. The recommendations were drawn from the council's "A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success," an action plan that asked for \$3.75 million annually to prevent and decrease homelessness in Wisconsin. Additionally, in February 2019, Republicans introduced a series of eight bills that had the same goals – the "A Hand for the Homeless" package. With both sides of the aisle working on the issue, there was hope that, before winter hit Wisconsin, the state would release funding and get to work on this pressing issue.

While all the funding was approved in the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) for the purpose of combatting homelessness, Republicans opted to hold the money in their supplemental appropriation fund, instead of releasing the dollars to the agencies charged with implementing the programs. Governor Evers included a detailed list of the programs that the funds would be used for, including increases for the Homeless Prevention Program, State Shelter Subsidy Grants, the Housing Assistance Program, and the creation of grants for Housing Navigation, etc. Yet, Republicans held back the funds, waiting instead for their own package of bills to be signed into law. Once again choosing partisanship over the good of Wisconsin.

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This legislation passed unanimously in both Senate and Assembly committees and before the full Assembly, but despite Democratic effort, Republicans blocked the bills in the Senate, and adjourned until January 2020.

On July 15, 2019 the Department of Administration (DOA) requested the release of the funds passed in the budget and several months later they have not received a response. Despite the funding already being designated for this purpose, Republicans are forcing our most vulnerable to needlessly wait while they leave for their holiday vacations.



Governor Evers sent a letter to the Republican JFC Co-Chairs, Senator Alberta Darling and Representative John Nygren, to release the funds on November 14, 2019, and JFC Democrats followed the call by requesting that the JFC convene to release the funding. Still, Republicans have stayed silent on the once bipartisan issue.

Those who are facing homelessness should not have to wait through the freezing Wisconsin winter months for Republicans to decide to do their job. There is support on both sides of the aisle for the legislation that was introduced by Republican Assembly members, yet Senate Republicans refuse to address this crucial issue.

Wisconsinites are sick of the constant political games. This is just another example of Republicans using tactics to stall progress in our state. Releasing the funds that the JFC is holding to combat homelessness should not be a partisan issue, and, with the funds already being slated for this purpose, the cost should not be preventing the programs from being executed.

Republicans have come out in support of these proposals. Democrats have pushed for the bills to be taken up in the Senate. Governor Evers has advocated for the funds. What is holding Senate Republicans back from taking the vote to help those in need?

There are only a few weeks left this year, and the legislature has yet to take up some of the most important issues to Wisconsinites. Wisconsinites expect more from their elected officials

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than to “play goalie” to issues that would have enormous positive impacts on our communities.