http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/sandy-hook-mother-s5.jpg

Time for Assembly to Step Up for Spouses and Children of Law Enforcement Officers Killed in the Line of Duty.

ASHLAND, WI - Soon we will all be celebrating the unofficial start to summer, Memorial Day. I will spend the day with a group of veterans from Mellen VFW Post 2273 visiting cemeteries across Ashland County. I'm honored to join them as they quietly pay their respects and remember the men and women who answered the call, and too often lost their lives defending our freedom. I also will speak at a Memorial Day Ceremony at the Northern WI Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spooner on the Saturday before Memorial Day. It's important to find the right words. Even more important is making sure that our actions speak as loud as our words.

The same is true when it comes to honoring the men and women who lose their lives policing our streets, fighting fires and responding to emergencies. Sadly, we've lost too many good public safety professionals in Wisconsin recently. In the 25th Senate District we lost Dan Glaze, a 33 year old Rusk County Deputy Sheriff killed in the line of duty responding to reports of a suspicious vehicle in November of 2016. Trevor Casper, a young Wisconsin State Trooper was gunned down in a grocery store parking lot in 2015. Dennis Swenson, a dedicated EMT for South Shore Ambulance, died trying to save his 95 year old mother who also perished in the fire in 2015. Dennis left behind an abundance of family and friends; he did not leave behind a family who depended on him for financial support.

Unfortunately, other public servants who lose their lives in the line of duty do leave behind spouses and children who depend on their incomes and benefits. In 2009 the legislature passed a law that required municipalities to pay health insurance premiums for the survivors of a Firefighter who dies, or has died, in the line of duty. For some reason, the law did not extend the same benefit to the surviving spouses and children of Law Enforcement Officers,

Emergency Medical Technicians, Rangers, Foresters and others who lose their lives while on duty protecting the public.

Jason Zunker, A Chippewa County Sheriff's Deputy and graduate of Maple Northwestern High School, died in the line of duty in 2008. He left behind a young wife, Lisa. After Deputy Zunker's loss, people in Northern Wisconsin began asking: "Why do we treat the surviving spouses and children of these public servants differently?" It is a good question, one that should be answered by passing legislation that extends the benefit to the young children and spouses left behind when any of our public safety personnel lose their lives while on duty.

I am proud to be working with one of my colleagues, Republican State Senator Van Wanggaard, a retired Racine Police Officer, to make this happen. I have coauthored a bill with him again this session to extend health insurance coverage for spouses and children of Law Enforcement Officers, DNR Firefighters, Correctional Officers and EMTs who are killed in the line of duty.

The bill passed in the State Senate, but not in the State Assembly. No one has been able to give me a straight answer as to why the Republicans who control the Assembly won't step up, pass the bill and send it to the Governor. Today Governor Walker will lay a wreath at a State Capitol Ceremony in honor of Wisconsin's fallen Law Enforcement Officers. At a similar ceremony earlier this month in Milwaukee, he laid another wreath and said "we owe them respect and honor their selfless courage." I couldn't agree more. I believe we can and should do better than some nice words and a wreath. We should pass the bill that provides health insurance benefits to their surviving spouses and children and give the Governor the chance to sign it.