

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Helps introduce bipartisan legislation to support rural EMS agencies

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin helped introduce bipartisan legislation to reauthorize a federal grant program that directly supports rural emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in training and recruiting staff and purchasing equipment, including naloxone, needed to reduce opioid overdose-related deaths.

“Rural communities have been hit hard by the opioid epidemic and we need to do all we can to make sure our first responders have the resources they need to help save lives,” said Senator Baldwin. “No first responder should be unable to save a life because they don’t have what they need. That is why I have worked to make naloxone and other critical resources more accessible and affordable.”

The Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Act, led by Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Pat Roberts (R-KS), would reauthorize \$20 million annually in competitive grant funding through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to support rural emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in training and recruiting staff, conducting courses to satisfy certification requirements and purchasing equipment—for everything from naloxone and first aid kits, to power stretchers or new ambulances.

A recent decline in primary care and hospital service availability, great distances

between health care facilities and low insurance reimbursement for transport and emergency treatment have all strained rural EMS agencies. At the same time, EMS agencies today are tasked with ever-greater responsibilities, including responding on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. These first responders are often the only health care providers in their area and face difficulty in personnel recruitment and retention, and securing expensive equipment.

Along with Senators Baldwin, Durbin and Roberts, Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) also cosponsored the SIREN Act.

The SIREN Act is supported by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Previously, Senator Baldwin has worked to pass bipartisan legislation that increases funding to support training on prevention of opioid overdose-related deaths as well as the purchase and distribution of naloxone to first responders.

More recently, as a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, Senator Baldwin worked to pass bipartisan legislation out of the committee that would expand a grant program from the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), which was designed to allow first responders to administer a drug or device, like naloxone, to treat an opioid overdose.