

Senate approves homeless bill, Dems call for more action

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The Senate unanimously approved a \$1 million boost to grants supporting emergency homeless shelters as Dems pressed their GOP colleagues to do more.

AB 119 is part of a package to address homelessness that cleared the Assembly overwhelmingly last year. But much of the eight-bill package has been hung up in the Senate over concerns from some Republicans about the price tag. Altogether, the bills would spend more than \$7.5 million over the next two years, and AB 119 is the first piece of the package to head toward the gov's desk.

Dems repeatedly pressed their GOP colleagues during the debate to do more.

Sen. Dale Kooyenga, R-Brookfield, said throwing money at homelessness won't solve the issue. Kooyenga, who volunteers at the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, said there is a broader scope of causes that need to be addressed. He said those who are homeless don't have family or friends they can call to take them in during a financial crisis. He also said those who are addicted are finding pleasure in drugs and alcohol rather than knowledge or the community.

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"This is not only a money issue. It's a relationship issue," Kooyenga said.

That drew a swift rebuke from Sen. Jon Erpenbach, who said Republicans have failed to address affordable housing or raise the minimum wage, both steps that would help many teetering on the verge of no longer having a place to live.

"They're not addicted because they can't find quote unquote pleasure," Erpenbach said. "They're addicted because they're sick."

The package was born out of a task force created under former Gov. Scott Walker that was chaired by former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch. Money to fund the bills was set aside in the budget but hasn't been released.