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Felzkowski (Czaja) Champions 9-1-1 and Fab Labs

Madison- The Joint Finance Committee unanimously adopted two motions Tuesday afternoon authored by Representative Mary (Czaja) Felzkowski (R-Irma). The first would create a fabrication laboratory (fab lab) grant for a non-profit to assist school districts with fab lab implementation and the second would take necessary first steps toward modernizing Wisconsin's 911 infrastructure.

The Fab Lab Initiative has grown substantially over the last four years. In the 2015 Act 55, the Legislature and the Governor created the first Fab Lab grants for \$500,000 over the biennium. School district interest in the grants was so overwhelming that WEDC elected to provide \$101,000 for additional grants from their own budget in 2016, and the Governor's 2017-19 Budget Proposal includes an additional \$1 million over the biennium.

The first adopted motion would allocate \$400,000 of that additional \$1 million over the biennium to direct WEDC to grant funding to a nonprofit organization to assist school districts with the technical aspect of establishing Fab Labs and developing curriculum.

"There are currently 175 Wisconsin school districts that have passed a resolution to initiate a fab lab in their district. With the growing demand, Wisconsin has quickly become the de facto leader in Fabrication Laboratory development and there is no other state that Wisconsin can look to for a model on curriculum," Rep. Felzkowski said. "This grant funding will help develop that model and aid these districts in utilizing their fab lab grant funds to increase outcomes for students."

The second adopted motion accomplishes the first step toward upgrading Wisconsin emergency communication systems. It would move the Interoperability Council to the Division of Emergency Management within the Department of Military Affairs. It would also authorize a Director of Emergency Communication that would lead a 911 Council in implementing a digital Next Generation 911 system that will improve the ability for the public to contact emergency services through text messages and video conferencing.

"Our state's emergency communication systems are unfortunately falling victim to outdated equipment and technology. Upgrading these systems is absolutely vital to ensuring public safety for all," Rep. Felzkowski said. "Giving all of these systems a home in Emergency Management will give us the best possible opportunity to make sure we're maximizing efficiencies among these systems state-wide."

These motions have now been adopted into the 2017-19 biennial budget proposal by the Joint Committee on Finance. After the budget bill has been voted out of the committee, it will be brought before both houses of the Legislature for approval.

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