TERRY VAN AKKEREN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • TWENTY SIXTH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

March 6, 2008

Members of the Assembly Education Committee,

I would like to thank you, Chairman Davis, for scheduling a hearing today on Assembly Bill 878. I appreciate the committee's dedication to such an important issue.

Derek Piaskowski was a 17 year old junior at Sheboygan North High School when he tragically took his life in 2002. Assembly Bill 878 is intended to help prevent similar situations like the one that Derek faced.

Teen suicide is a serious problem that continues to affect our nation's youth. According to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) most recent data (2003-2004), the suicide rate for 10 to 24 year olds increased by 8 percent, the largest single year increase in 15 years. Wisconsin has the 8th highest rate of youth suicide according to the same CDC study (over a 4 year period ending in 2003). Youth suicide is the second leading cause of death in Wisconsin behind motor vehicle accidents.

Fortunately, if identified early, severe depression and suicidal behavior can be effectively treated, and many people can quickly begin to feel relief. Parents play an important role in early detection of the threat of suicide. Teachers and educational staff, who interact with their students on a daily basis for a large portion of the year, are also major players in the recognition of suicidal tendencies.

Currently, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is required by state law to compile information on suicide prevention and create training programs that are available to all professional educational staff. The information organized by DPI, however, is not reaching nearly enough staff members, and many are not aware that DPI can provide them with this free resource. Assembly Bill 878 would work with schools and school districts, both public and private, to ensure that all staff receive annual notice of the information that is available to them through DPI.

As youth suicide statistics continue to reflect the nation's struggle with depression and its side effects, it is clear that action is needed to correct the trend. By informing our state's educators and staff of the well developed and useful material DPI has created, we are ensuring Wisconsin is doing its part to fight the current upward trend in youth suicide. Awareness is a valuable asset in working to counter this silent killer.

Once again, I would like to thank Chairman Davis and the Assembly Committee on Education for scheduling a hearing on Assembly Bill 878.

Sincerely,

Terry Van Akkeren

Terry Van Akkeren
State Representative
26th Assembly District

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