



JEFF SMITH

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR – 31ST DISTRICT



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 20, 2024

CONTACT: Beau Stafford
beau.stafford@legis.wi.gov
608-266-8546

Flawed HSHS Bill Clears State Senate

MADISON - Today, senate bills 1014 (SB 1014) and 1015 (SB 1015) were passed during the senate session floor period. These bill are aimed at alleviating the health care crisis in the Chippewa Valley area after HSHS decided to close area hospitals and clinics by April 21st, 2024.

In the 2021-23 Biennial State Budget, the legislature approved \$15 million for capital improvements at Sacred Heart Hospital for their behavioral health department to increase psychiatric mental health bed capacity. HSHS did not use the funding to expand their behavioral health services. Under current law, the \$15 million funding cannot be used for any other purpose. SB 1015, as approved by the Senate with a 30-2 vote, redirects the money to the Joint Finance Committee to be spent on hospital emergency department services.

“It’s encouraging to see broad bipartisan agreement to repurpose this funding,” said Senator Jeff Smith (D-Brunswick). “The difference lies in whether we want to tie the hands of decision-makers for utilizing the money.”

As written and passed today by the State Senate with a vote of 22-10, SB 1014 would restrict the funds to only capital expenditures for emergency departments despite local health care providers asking for flexibility. Obstetrics, inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services, wound care, urgent care services and oncology treatments are just a few of the immediate and urgent requests from area health care providers. None of these services or improvements would be eligible for funding under SB 1014.

“Ironically, SB 1014 will do more harm than good if signed into law,” said Senator Jeff Smith. “We shouldn’t unnecessarily constrain our community during this crisis.”

SB 1014 and SB 1015 need approval by the State Assembly before heading to Governor Tony Evers for his signature or veto.

“I encourage everyone in the Chippewa Valley to reach out to their local state representatives in the State Assembly and ask them to send this bill back to committee,” said Senator Jeff Smith. “We need to let health providers instead of politicians determine the best use of these funds for patients still reeling from the HSHS closure.”

#

The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.