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ARCW Applauds Wisconsin Legislature on Adoption of HOPE Legislative Package

Legislation will save lives from opiate overdose

MILWAUKEE... The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) is applauding the Wisconsin Legislature for its adoption of the Heroin and Opiate Prevention and Education (HOPE) legislative package. The four bills introduced by Representative John Nygren (R-Marinette) and Senator Shelia Harsdorf (R-River Falls) were each adopted unanimously by both the Wisconsin State Senate and State Assembly.

“Heroin use is on the rise in Wisconsin and with it we have experienced an increase in the number of heroin overdoses. This comprehensive package is a result of a collaborative effort with all levels of government and stakeholders including local sheriff’s departments, DA’s and treatment professionals,” states Nygren. “My hope is that we can prevent at least one family from suffering through the effects of heroin and prescription addiction.

“The HOPE package is an important step towards saving lives and avoiding further tragedies as we continue to fight heroin addiction,” Harsdorf said. “I applaud both houses for passing these bills with broad support and look forward to working with my colleagues on additional initiatives in our effort to combat drug use and addiction.”

“Our HIV and opiate overdose prevention programs are smart, evidenced-based interventions that are reaching difficult to reach individuals,” said Mike Gifford, ARCW President and Chief Executive Officer. “The HOPE legislation will strengthen our programs and enable us to continue to save lives across Wisconsin. We thank Representative Nygren and Senator Harsdorf for their tremendous leadership as Wisconsin tackles the heroin epidemic.”

Because injection drug use remains one of the primary ways that HIV and hepatitis C are spread, ARCW has conducted aggressive prevention programs targeting injection drug users since 1994. The prevention programs carried out by ARCW are based on the belief there is value in all human life and that every day presents a new opportunity to help someone battling addiction find the treatment they need to find sobriety.

Since 2005, ARCW has been on the frontlines of Wisconsin's response to the heroin and opiate epidemic by training injection drug users on how to safely use naloxone. Naloxone is an opioid antagonist that can save the life of an individual experiencing an overdose by immediately counteracting the ability of the opiate to shut down the central nervous system. Since the

program began, ARCW has trained more than 2,500 injection drug users to use naloxone safely and more than 2,100 of them have indicated they used the naloxone and training provided by ARCW to save the life of someone from an overdose.

The four bills comprising the HOPE package will ensure naloxone is widely available, remove barriers that cause reluctance in activating emergency medical services by people witnessing an overdose, and help reduce the diversion of opiate-based prescription medications.

On January 14, 2014, the Wisconsin State Assembly unanimously passed the HOPE package. The four bills were adopted by the Wisconsin State Senate unanimously on February 18, 2014 and now await the Governor's signature.

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