



ROBB KAHL
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

March 5, 2014

Representative Mike Kuglitsch, Chair
Assembly Committee on Energy and
Utilities

Senator Paul Farrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Government
Operations, Public Works, and
Telecommunications

Chair Kuglitsch, Chair Farrow and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing today on Assembly Bill 803 and Senate Bill 629. I especially want to thank Representative Kuglitsch and Senator Farrow for authoring these bills with me.

Wisconsin utilities consider worker and public safety to be a top priority especially when projects are undertaken within the public right-of-way. They hire and contract with highly skilled professionals who are able to undertake a variety of tasks – frequently high risk tasks – and get those jobs done without endangering themselves or members of the public. These utilities and the persons who work for them know that having a substance abuser on the job site could easily get someone killed.

This bill will have no effect on the majority of companies that perform utility work within public right-of- ways. Many already have programs in place in accordance with provisions of federal law. Others recognize the dangers of substance abuse and have programs in place that already put them in compliance with the provisions of this bill – if it were to become law. These programs and testing do not come without some cost, but it is a price that should be paid in order to protect worker and public safety.

However, I have learned that small loopholes in the system exist. This bill is an effort to close the loopholes and ensure that what has been the practice of most entities involved in utility work within the public right-of-way will be the standard practice for everyone.

In addition to the substance abuse provisions, this bill modifies the "move over or slow down" law to make it applicable to vehicles used by public utilities that are displaying flashing warning lights. If a utility vehicle is parked on or within 12 feet of a roadway, the operator of an approaching vehicle must move over or slow down. This is especially critical when you consider the weather conditions these workers often go out in to make repairs.

Whether someone is working to install high voltage power lines, gas lines, or other utilities the one thing they should all have in common is the ability to go home to their families at the end of the day. AB 803 and SB 629 make common sense changes to current law that will better protect the safety of workers and the general public. I appreciate your consideration and support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Robb Kahl
State Representative
47th Assembly District