

## **ROBERT L. COWLES**

**Wisconsin State Senator  
2nd Senate District**

### **Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 296**

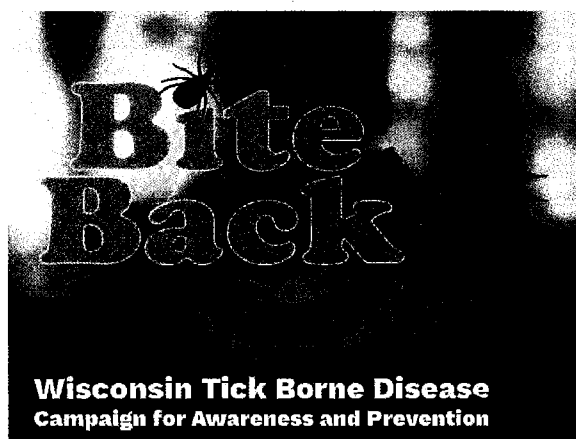
**Senator Robert Cowles**

**Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – September 3, 2019**

Thank you, committee members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Senate Bill 296. This bill requires signage to raise awareness of Lyme disease to be posted on each State Park System property.

The problem of Lyme disease is growing and shows no signs of slowing. Lyme disease is a bacterial disease transmitted to humans by an infected tick commonly known as the black-legged tick or deer tick. Lyme disease is manageable if caught early, but if left untreated, the infection may spread and produce symptoms that include, but aren't limited to, severe headaches and neck stiffness, pain and swelling in large joints, fatigue, cognitive decline, shooting pains, and heart palpitations.

Lyme disease is the most commonly reported vector-borne illness, which are diseases contracted by humans from animals and usually through a bite, in the United States with an estimated 30,000 Americans diagnosed each year. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2014, nearly 96% of the 25,359 Lyme disease cases are reported from only 14 states in the Northeast and Northern Midwest with 2,975 of these cases (11.7%) reported from Wisconsin. Lyme disease is the highest reported tick-borne disease in Wisconsin, with a total of 38,394 cases reported between 1990 and 2015. In 2017, Wisconsin is the 4th-worst state in the nation for incidence of Lyme disease, and rates are only increasing. Lyme disease is most common in the Northern and Western regions of the state, but is contracted in all regions of the state.



While about a dozen other states have taken actions to address the disease in recent sessions, Wisconsin has fallen behind as rates of Lyme disease has doubled in the last decade and experts at the CDC believe the number of cases may be as much as 10 times higher than what is reported through surveillance. This bill is one of five in a series of small, yet important steps to improve our approach and foster continuing discussions to combat Lyme disease in Wisconsin.

Senate Bill 296 requires signage designed by the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Health Services to raise awareness of Lyme disease, inform on how to prevent tick bites, and encourage visitors to check for ticks after visits to be posted in common areas such as the park entrance, a trailhead, or in a campground in all state parks, forests, recreational areas, and trails with at least one sign per property. Legislation similar to this was recently implemented in New York and is recommended by the Department of Health Services' Environmental Public Health Tracking Program.

These signs would not be there to alarm, but instead will inform visitors on the dangers of Lyme disease and the simple steps to lower their risk of becoming the next case of Lyme disease. Not only will visitors be more aware while on state properties, but these signs will help to remind people to be aware of ticks while in their own backyards and anytime they spend time outdoors.



# Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
SB 296- Posting Signs about Lyme Disease in State Parks  
September 3, 2019

Chairman Cowles and Committee Members -

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 296, which would help raise awareness about Lyme Disease and steps to take to prevent tick bites.

Specifically, the bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to work with the Department of Health Services (DHS) to design signs that would be displayed in our state parks, trails, recreational areas and state forests. The signs would inform visitors about the dangers of Lyme disease, offer tips on how to prevent tick bites, and encourage people to check for ticks.

This isn't just an "up north" issue. Ticks are present in all counties in Wisconsin and can be found in woods, brush, or tall grass. According to DHS, in 2018 Wisconsin had over 3,100 estimated cases of Lyme Disease. The average number of cases has more than doubled over the past 10 years. According to the CDC, Wisconsin is one of the states reporting the highest number of cases and in all reality the actual number of cases is probably a lot higher than what is reported.

The good news is that Lyme Disease is treatable, but early detection is important. Initially, a person might experience a rash or fever that can be treated with antibiotics. However, if a person leaves the infection untreated it can lead to arthritis or facial paralysis.

Individuals who spend a lot of time outdoors are the most susceptible to picking up a tick. That's why it makes sense to put signs up in our state parks, trails, recreation areas, and state forests that encourage visitors to take precautions.

Once again, thank you for holding a hearing on SB 296 today. I'm happy to answer any questions.

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## **Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy**

### *2019 Senate Bill 296* *Lyme Disease Signs on DNR Lands* *September 3, 2019*

Good afternoon Chairman Cowles and members of the Committee. My name is Missy VanLanduyt, and I am the Section Chief for Recreation Partnerships in the Bureau of Parks and Recreations Management with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 296 (SB 296), which requires the Department to post signs about Lyme disease on Wisconsin State Park System lands. These lands include state parks, state trails, state recreation areas, and state forests. We also want to acknowledge and thank the bill authors for reaching out to us and working with the DNR prior to this bill being introduced.

Lyme disease is a significant concern for our visitors and staff. Reported cases have more than doubled across the state in the past 10 years. Everyone who works in the Wisconsin State Park System knows someone with, or who has had, Lyme disease, or has had it themselves. This bill is designed to help raise awareness of Lyme disease, inform individuals about how to prevent tick bites, and encourage people to check for ticks after visiting our properties.

SB 296 directs the Department to work with the Department of Health Services to develop the signs, and with our staff and partners to post the signs. One sign is required at each property, posted in a high visibility location.

We appreciate the \$12,500 appropriation in each year of the biennium contained in the bill to help us fund this effort and we believe we would be able to implement this bill within six months, as required in the legislation.

On behalf of the Wisconsin State Park System and the DNR, thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

**Testimony of behalf of The Friends of Wisconsin State Parks (FWSP) Supportive of Senate Bills 296, 297, 298, 300**

FSWP supports passage of the above senate bills. There are aprox 70 Friends Groups that have donated millions of dollars and thousands of hours of volunteer labor to state lands properties. Many of these properties are in the heart of tick country.

Tick and tick spread diseases are the scourge of outdoor living. You don't have to wander off the beaten path to find them or for ticks to find you! Ticks are now present in every Midwest State and all counties in WI. Ten to fifteen years ago, ticks were rare in the southern WI but that's all changed. Ticks are on the move which is causing an increasingly severe public health threat. Many people are actively outdoors deal with this menace on a regular basis. It's gotten to the point where almost everyone knows someone who has Lyme disease.

Preventing Lyme Disease is not about keeping people from visiting Wisconsin's great outdoors, but instead it's about educating people on how to prevent tick bites, how to search the body for ticks and raising the awareness of the warning signs of Lyme Disease to catch the disease early

The proposed legislation will help Wisconsin deal with this huge health care issue. While over a dozen other states have taken action to combat the Lyme Disease, Wisconsin has fallen behind in addressing the issue, and while we cannot prevent every case, we have a vital need to address Lyme Disease to help the people of our state.

The most dangerous tick species is the female deer or black-legged tick which unfortunately is very common in Wisconsin. Deer ticks represent the gravest threat to humans and companion animals due to their propensity to carry and spread a variety of diseases. They can carry Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, tick-borne relapsing fever, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis and Powassan illness. If caught early most cases are treated successfully with antibiotics. That's why this legislation is so important. Each year, approximately 30,000 cases are reported, according to the (CDC). Recent estimates suggest that approximately 300,000 people get Lyme Disease, only 1/10 cases are reported and many of these evolve into an extensive disease process which can be devastating . That's another reason why this legislation should be passed. Wisconsin is now ranked 4th worst in the country in the prevalence of Lyme Disease.

Ticks are tough animals to deal with. They can spend months off their hosts, without feeding due to their low resting metabolic rates. Then rise from near dead to latch on to a host. Recent evidence indicates that the aggressive Lone Star tick is moving through Illinois and into southern Wisconsin. This is another dangerous tick species that carries a variety of diseases.

The four bills on the agenda Tuesday are part of a larger 5 bill package which are all sorely needed.

By emphasizing awareness, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Lyme Disease through these bills, the Legislature has made a bold first step to fight Lyme Disease and other vector-borne illnesses in our state.

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Friends of Wisconsin State Parks Policy Chairperson