

SCI Funding Bill Has Votes, Needs Floor Vote

Wisconsin legislators propose to fund spinal cord injury research. The measure has widespread bipartisan support but it is awaiting a floor vote.

MINNEAPOLIS, MN, UNITED STATES, February 5, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A bill in Wisconsin to

set up \$3 million in biannual funding for [spinal cord injury](#) (SCI) research is inches away from crossing the finish line.



It's never been about the money. In fact, the legislators were convinced that the SCI bill could potentially save Wisconsin taxpayers money by reducing the burden of care for a healthier community."

Jason Stoffer

The SCI research bill is not controversial and has widespread support, with 28 Representatives and eight Senators signing on as co-authors. It has cleared all but one hurdle: it must get to a floor vote in the legislature, which can happen only after being released by the state Joint Finance Committee (JFC).

"We have shepherded this bill for five years and we have the necessary votes from the Republican majority and

from Democrats, including Governor Tony Evers," said advocate Jason Stoffer. "The heavy lifting is done, we have the votes – we just need to get it on the floor for a vote."

Stoffer, who co-leads an advocacy team from Unite 2 Fight [Paralysis](#), said the floor vote was anticipated in the latter part of the 2023 legislative session. "Now," he said, "the bill will essentially expire by the end of February if it remains stalled in the JFC. We are facing the end of the legislative session – if we miss this deadline, it means we have to start all over re-introducing the bill and guiding it toward passage."

The key GOP sponsors of the legislation, Sen. Van Wanggaard of Racine and Rep. Paul Tittl of Manitowoc continue to voice their support for it. And the bill has a majority of co-authors from the Republican Party.

Said Wanggaard, "This legislation is not just the right thing to do from a policy perspective but is also very personal to me. A spinal cord injury I suffered while on duty as a police officer inadvertently led me to become a state senator."

Said Tittl, "The bill is an important one for so many people throughout the state. We have made wonderful progress regarding a wide-range of other medical conditions, and there is no reason we cannot find a cure for spinal cord injuries as well."

"We are not sure what the hold up is. We suspect the legislature is being distracted by other big ticket items, and a redistricting battle, and is not paying close attention to this bill," said Stoffer.

U2FP and the Wisconsin SCI community are quick to stress that the intent of the bill has nothing to do with partisan politics. "Our advocates, who live with SCI, represent both parties," said Matthew Rodreick, Executive Director for U2FP. "We know that SCI can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere. This legislation is non-partisan, non-discriminatory. The money will support research to improve the health and well being of everyone."

Said Rodreick, "We know that leadership in the majority party wants to provide a \$2 billion tax rebate from the state's surplus. Our SCI advocates wonder if Wisconsinites would be willing to get \$1 less in their rebate to help improve the lives of people with spinal cord injuries."

Wisconsin advocates plan to mount a full court press effort to get the bill out of committee for a vote.

"We will work with our legislative allies and retell our story," said Stoffer. "It's never been about the money. In fact, the legislators were convinced that the SCI bill could potentially save Wisconsin taxpayers money by reducing the burden of care for a healthier, more independent community."

Stoffer noted that other bills that SCI advocates have successfully passed in Minnesota and Ohio have shown a return on investment. "These state funds have seeded promising research projects that have then attracted dollars from federal funding agencies like the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense."

"As someone with quadriplegia, I can attest that this bill can improve our lives," said MacKenzie Wann, from Madison. "Look no further than our neighbor Minnesota where similar legislation was passed with great success. I underwent a procedure in Minneapolis for an implant – a device that emerged from research directly funded by a state SCI funding bill. This implant has helped me restore some function and has dramatically reduced my medication intake, lending to an overall better well-being."

SCI research funded by the bill can lead to better in-state care for those living with the injury. "I've had to travel out of the state of Wisconsin nearly ten times for better treatment options for myself," said Samantha Troyer, a high-level quadriplegic from Oconomowoc. "This is unacceptable."

"I see a lot of effort on accommodation for the SCI injured," said Keith Van Patten, who has a spinal cord injury. "But we really need research directed specifically at functional improvements to impact our lives in a major way. This proposal in Wisconsin would do just that."

About Unite 2 Fight Paralysis: Founded in 2005, U2FP is a nonprofit dedicated to unify and empower the international spinal cord injury community to cure paralysis through advocacy, education, and support for research. Contact Executive Director Matthew Rodreick for more information, matthewrodreick@u2fp.org

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