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## Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele asks for \$1.1 million to fight opioids, addiction

**Bill Glauber**, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

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(Photo: Mike De Sisti, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele will propose \$1.1 million in new funding in the county's 2018 budget to help two key agencies deal with the opioid crisis and addiction.

Abele's budget is due by Oct. 1.

Abele's office said Wednesday his budget allocates \$200,000 toward the purchase of an advanced mass spectrometer instrument to help the medical examiner's office slash testing time for opioids and other drugs.

The push to cut testing time will help law enforcement and public health officials to close cases more quickly and alert the public when a spate of fatal drugs flow into the community.

Abele will also request funding for an additional medical examiner and forensic chemist to help the office cope with a surge of drug-related deaths.

In the county's Behavioral Health Division, Abele will ask for an additional \$700,000 for the AODA (Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction) residential program to help increase enrollment. The program serves Milwaukee County residents aged 18 to 59 with a history of alcohol or drug abuse.

The Behavioral Health Division is also budgeting \$200,000 to sponsor a peer-run respite program. The nonmedical program is designed to help individuals through a short-term crisis and connect them to services.

In a statement, Abele said: "The alarming and continuing rise in drug-related deaths is a public health crisis that is tearing families apart and straining public safety resources throughout the county. It is imperative that we invest resources into prevention and recovery. That includes supporting law enforcement as they cut off deadly supplies of drugs and working with individuals and families who are battling addiction."

Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel praised Abele's budget proposal.

"As we've seen with the state's successful HOPE legislation, our commitment to ending the drug abuse epidemic extends beyond party lines," Schimel said in a statement. "County Executive Abele's budget proposal demonstrates his dedication to fighting the opioid epidemic in Milwaukee County and recognition that all parts of the system, including public health and addiction treatment specialists, are being taxed by this crisis. I look forward to partnering with him on future initiatives, like the state's drug disposal program."

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Milwaukee County Medical Examiner Brian Peterson said there has been a 12% spike in autopsy cases this year, primarily driven by opioid-related deaths.

He said there is a need for a sixth pathologist in his office to ensure it keeps its accreditation with the National Association of Medical Examiners. If annual caseloads go over 325 cases per pathologist, the office could lose full accreditation, he said.

With an advanced mass spectrometer instrument, Peterson said his office could do the drug screens in-house, cutting turnaround time from several weeks to within 24 hours.

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"I think not only is it much more efficient, but it would be helpful to law enforcement, emergency medical services and the district attorney's office."

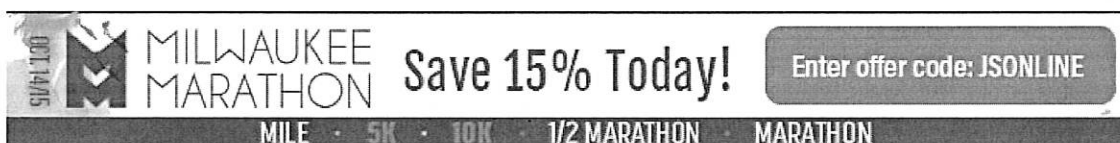
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