

Gov. Evers to Announce Plan to Build Upon “Kai 11” Bill

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Plan to invest in EKG Screening Pilot to Protect Student-Athlete Health. Mother, loved ones of Kai Lermer to attend as governor’s guests to 2023-25 biennial budget message.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers tonight will announce his 2023-25 budget will build upon 2021 Wisconsin Act 210, also known as the “Kai 11” bill. The “Kai 11” bill [was signed](#) by the governor last year in honor of 16-year-old Waukesha North High School student-athlete Kai Lermer. Kai was playing a pick-up game of basketball in 2019 when he went into cardiac arrest due to an undiagnosed heart condition and passed away. An electrocardiogram (EKG) screening could have discovered Kai’s condition, allowing Kai and his family to take life-saving precautions and preventative measures.

Gov. Evers and First Lady Kathy Evers will welcome Kai’s mother and close family and friends at the governor’s 2023-25 biennial budget message tonight, Wed., Feb. 15, 2023, at 7 p.m.

“As a former educator and the father and grandfather of kids involved in student athletics, I know that every parent or adult whose kids participate in these activities wants every kid to be safe when they do. Student athletics play a valuable role in kids’ health, wellness, social connections, and academic success, but hidden heart conditions like Kai’s present a scary risk,” said Gov. Evers. “The ‘Kai 11’ bill created a pathway for us to raise awareness of this important issue, but we have to continue building upon that important work so parents can make the best decisions for their kids’ health. The ‘Kai 11’ bill is saving lives, and I believe that this initiative will, too.”

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Kai’s parents, Mike and Patty, along with Kai’s godfather, Paul Ybarra, have been tireless advocates for raising awareness about cardiac conditions in student-athletes in the years since Kai’s passing. Their leadership and relentless advocacy were key to passing the “Kai 11” bill, as was the dedication of Kai’s friends, school and district leadership, local elected officials, and representatives from the Wisconsin Athletic Trainers Association, the American Heart Association, and Children’s Wisconsin.

“The Kai Lermer Memorial Foundation has funded low-cost EKG screening for high school athletes in Southeastern Wisconsin over the past three years. We have identified dozens of kids at risk and several with Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome. Identifying those kids with an increased risk in their EKG results now, before a Sudden Cardiac Arrest event, gives that parent and child options that Kai did not have. This EKG Screening Pilot will identify kids at risk and save lives,” said Paul Ybarra, co-founder of The Kai Lermer Memorial Fund and Kai’s godfather.

The governor’s plan, which he is set to announce tonight, provides more than \$4.1 million in funding to local health departments to implement an EKG screening program for youths participating in athletics. Under the pilot, the state will provide funding to local health departments in Waukesha and Milwaukee Counties to implement a pilot screening program to ultimately help prevent cardiac-related health incidents in area student-athletes. The pilot will be critical in identifying any best practices and strategies for consideration in developing a future potential statewide expansion of the screening program.

Gov. Evers signed the “Kai 11” bill in March 2022, which required developing and distributing information on the nature and risks of sudden cardiac arrest to participants in youth athletics offered to people ages 12 and older.

The “Kai 11” bill requires the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to provide information on the risks of continuing athletic activity after experiencing sudden cardiac arrest symptoms; the potential risks, benefits, and evidence for EKG testing; and how to request an EKG from a student’s healthcare provider to participants in youth athletics offered to persons 12 years and older. The information, much like resources shared about the risks of head injuries and concussions, helps ensure parents and families can take action to understand a student’s heart health before they begin to participate in youth athletics. A photo of the governor’s bill signing event at Waukesha North High School is available [here](#).

According to Mayo Clinic, while millions of student-athletes compete every year without incident and most deaths are in older adults, sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in young athletes. Mayo Clinic estimates that around one in every 50,000 youth athletes dies of sudden cardiac arrest every year.