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State should pass no-smoking bill

The Business Journal of Milwaukee

A controversial bill that would ban smoking in all Wisconsin restaurants and bars finally took its first step forward this week. State legislators should follow suit and approve the long-awaited measure.

The Senate Committee on Public Health, Senior Issues, Long Term Care and Privacy did the right thing Jan. 8 in recommending approval of the ban, which was first proposed almost a year ago at the same time Gov. Jim Doyle introduced his state budget.

It was put on hold while legislators spent endless months debating the budget bill before finally approving it in November.

In past years, The Business Journal has opposed individual community smoking bans because they are unfair to those businesses in communities that have a ban, but are near communities that don't have one.

A statewide ban makes much more sense because it puts all businesses on an even playing field and helps address one of the many causes of the Milwaukee area's rising health care costs.

The ban is even more important now that most of the surrounding states are moving in the same direction. Illinois last week began prohibiting smoking in all workplaces, restaurants and taverns. Minnesota has had the same law since last fall and Michigan and Iowa have bills pending. In all, 23 states have smoking bans or are implementing them.

The bill is even supported by the Wisconsin Restaurant League. It is time for state legislators to do their jobs and pass the ban.