

WISCONSIN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION, INC.



Date: May 3, 2017
To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Mining
From: Eric Borgerding, President/CEO
Re: Support of Rural Wisconsin Initiative Health Care Legislation

On behalf of nearly 140 hospitals and health systems in our state, the Wisconsin Hospital Association appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of several pieces of *Rural Wisconsin Initiative* legislation designed to invest resources into three key areas of health care in rural communities; workforce, quality improvement and population health. The legislation before you was crafted in cooperation with the staff and members of the Wisconsin Hospital Association, an organization that has represented the core of Wisconsin's health care delivery system since 1920 and has been a leading voice on health care policy.

Wisconsin's hospitals and health systems are critical components of the state's economy. When asked by employers what factors are most important when determining where to locate or expand their business, access to high quality health care consistently ranks in the top two or three infrastructure investments. Wisconsin is home to some of the highest quality health care in the country, which is a result of dedicated hospital leaders, physicians and staff but also public policy that supports high quality health care.

Today, you are hearing four pieces of legislation that have received national attention among other hospital associations across country as a unique focus on improving access to high quality health care in rural America. We applaud the authors for developing this legislation and we applaud Chair VanderMeer and members of the Committee for hearing these bills today.

Innovative Workforce Investments for Rural Health Care Providers

Assembly Bill 224 and **Assembly Bill 227** both provide grant funding to support health care provider training in rural communities. Modeled after a successful initiative put forward by Governor Walker in the 2013-15 biennial budget to support physician residency programs, the legislation before you incentivizes hospitals and health systems to offer new training opportunities for advanced practice clinicians and allied health professionals.

According to *WHA's 2016 Workforce Report*, hospital staff vacancy rates for advanced practice clinicians continue to climb – with nurse practitioners and physician assistants at 11.2% and 10.8%, respectively. This is the highest vacancy rate since at least 2009, which is the result of a strengthened economy resulting in more retirements but also an increase in the utility of these roles on the patient care team. Many of our members are using advanced practice clinicians in innovative roles, like advanced practice nurse prescriber hospitalists, to meet the needs of patients in Wisconsin's rural communities.

When thinking of the evolution of health care professional roles, the breadth of this analysis should not be limited to nurse practitioners and physician assistants. Allied health professionals, a significant segment of the hospital and health system workforce, is large, diverse and critical to key functions of care delivery – especially as we move towards population health. In Wisconsin, hospitals are experiencing some of the highest vacancy rates since 2009 for surgical techs, lab techs, pharmacy techs, and certified nursing assistants.

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The demand for dietitians and nutritionists spiked in 2016, with a hospital vacancy rate that nearly tripled from 2015. As hospitals continue to look at value-based payment and population health, demand for roles like dietitians/nutritionists, patient care navigators and social workers will continue to increase.

Assembly Bill 224 provides matching grants to hospitals, health systems and educational entities that form consortia for the purposes of training allied health professionals. The definition of allied health professional can range from a master's prepared therapist to a pharmacy technician who receives on the job training. AB 224 is designed to incent educational entities and health care employers to come together and offer training that is flexible and meets the needs that exist today – which may be different from the needs that have existed in the past or will exist in the future.

Assembly Bill 227, the Rural Education for Advanced Clinicians in Health Care (REACH) Act, creates an incentive for a hospital or clinic in a rural community to offer clinical training for advanced practice clinicians, defined in the bill as advanced practice nurses and physician assistants. We know from research done with physician residency programs that a provider who trains in an area is more likely to practice in that area. The legislation not only provides matching grant funds for the cost of clinical rotations, but also provides incentives for students to train in rural communities (e.g. tuition forgiveness, travel costs, reasonable living expenses) – with a matching contribution from a sponsoring organization.

The REACH Act will be the first of its kind in Wisconsin – possibly the first of its kind across the nation – by providing state support for the training of professionals that are increasingly important to ensure rural Wisconsin citizens have access to the high quality, high value health care Wisconsin is known for.

Strengthening Wisconsin's Commitment to Quality Improvement

Wisconsin enjoys some of the highest quality health care in the country. In fact, in nine of the last ten years – Wisconsin's quality ratings from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality have ranked among the top four states in the country. This high quality care does not come by chance, it comes from the dedicated leadership, physicians and staff at our state's hospitals and health systems.

WHA is proud to be a partner in our members' well documented quality success. Since 2008, WHA has staffed an in-house quality improvement team to work on various projects that improve patient care outcomes, lower cost and drive efficiency in the overall health care system. **Assembly Bill 255** provides \$100,000 in additional funding to the Wisconsin Hospital Association Foundation's Quality Improvement Fund to increase participation by rural hospitals in quality improvement work or broaden the scope of quality improvement activities provided by the Association. The bill also requires the Association to report the results of these quality improvement activities back to both houses of the state legislature.

Population Health Improvement and Wellness in Rural Communities

As our members look to the future, they see the need and the desire to pay for wellness and not sickness. Keeping people out of the hospital may someday be just as significant to hospital reimbursement as how many people come through their hospital doors. While paying for wellness is the desired outcome by many, this goal is much more difficult to accomplish in rural communities that have scarcer resources for population health and wellness services. When coupled with medical services that are part of a patient's care plan, medical wellness programs can provide critical rehabilitation and prevention services and can improve overall health care outcomes for patients.

Assembly Bill 222 provides for one-time funding of at least two medical wellness facilities and programs in Wisconsin, designed to address community health needs and provide chronic illness management, occupational health, rehabilitation, wellness and prevention services. The organization must be a hospital or health system with a hospital or clinic located in a rural area and must also match the grant amount.



TO: Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Mining
Representative Nancy VanderMeer, Chair

FROM: Jeremy Levin, MHA,
Director of Advocacy

DATE: May 3, 2017

RE: SUPPORT Rural Wisconsin Initiative

The Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC), owned and operated by forty rural community hospitals, thanks you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on the seven bills that comprise the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. RWHC thanks the 25 lawmakers who have authored this effort and the bipartisan list of legislators who have signed on to specific pieces of legislation.

RWHC has long supported cross-sector collaboration and realizes the need to improve more than just community health status, and that is why we wholeheartedly support the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, having supported ways to boost rural broadband and will look forward to the continuing package of legislation “meant to improve access to education, health care, technology, and workforce development in rural Wisconsin.”

AB 222

Access to high quality healthcare is one of the most pressing needs in rural Wisconsin and helping to maintain a healthy lifestyle is equally important. AB 222 helps meet that need by investing in the creation of rural wellness facilities and programs. RWHC members have varying types of wellness facilities and can only offer varying degrees of access to their employees and community.

AB 224

Rural health care entities leverage a team-based care approach where the expertise of all members of the health care team is utilized. Team-based health care promotes using provider resources in the right place, at the right time, and in the right setting. AB 224 creates a grant program that would be available to rural hospitals and educational entities that work together to form training consortia focused on growing this sector of the workforce. RWHC has worked with its members and their communities to support “on the job” training. Health care has had a long history in apprenticeship learning across different health provider professionals. Developing community-based health professional training programs and enhancing health education resources across the state by allowing students to experience firsthand the challenges, opportunities and rewards of health professions is a very judicious use of health care dollars. This bill is also supported by the Wisconsin Council on Medical Education and Workforce, a collaboration of health care workforce stakeholders, which RWHC sits as a sponsoring institution.

AB 227

Advanced Practice Clinicians (APCs), such as physician assistants and advanced practice nurses, play crucial roles in rural hospitals, serving as a primary care access point for a wide range of settings and patients. AB 227, the Wisconsin REACH Act – Rural Education for Advanced Clinicians in Healthcare – will support, educate and train APCs in rural communities. This follows a successful model that has been created for physicians. RWHC leads the Wisconsin Collaborative for Rural Graduate Medical Education (WCRGME), which in just five years funding has made it possible to grow from the Collaborative’s initial eight organizations interested in developing and sustaining rural graduate medical education (GME) funding, to more than 30 hospitals, clinics, and residencies investigating and developing rural GME, and that number is growing. A similar model for APCs must be developed in rural areas of the state, where some hospital vacancy rates for these professions exceed 10%.

AB 255

RWHC supports grant monies going to the Wisconsin Hospital Association Foundation Quality Improvement Fund to both increase participation by rural hospitals in quality improvement activities and broaden the scope of quality improvement activities. Wisconsin has had a strong culture of quality improvement, which is why in 2012 a full 98% of Wisconsin hospitals were voluntarily participating in WHA’s quality improvement initiative, *Partners for Patients*. Rural hospitals have been and will continue to be engaged in quality improvement efforts.

Thank you again for this opportunity to express our support for the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. We encourage the Committee to act on these bills so that they might become law and more can be done to help rural areas and the health care providers that serve these areas of Wisconsin.



SHANNON ZIMMERMAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 30th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Mining May 4, 2017

Before I begin I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 255, and the positive impact it will have on rural Wisconsin hospitals.

Wisconsin is fortunate to have some of the highest quality health care in the country, but we need to give health care providers the tools to continuously support quality improvement programs in our state.

Assembly Bill 255, which is part of the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, will authorize \$100,000 on an annual basis to the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) Foundation Hospital Quality Improvement Fund to expand the quality improvement work conducted by the Association. Among several ideas considered for future development, WHA's initiatives could include a public awareness campaign to be replicated by hospitals across Wisconsin that would educate patients about responsible prescription drug use.

This investment in quality improvement will provide additional resources to address the most pressing issues impacting rural hospitals in Wisconsin. Moreover, this bill will help rural hospitals strengthen programs to reduce hospital readmissions, educate patients about our prescription drug epidemic and provide training for care providers to lower hospital-acquired conditions leads to better care, fewer complications and lower costs for our state's patients.

In closing, I encourage you to support Assembly Bill 255. The many doctors, nurses, and staff of our Wisconsin hospitals are working tirelessly to make a difference for the patients they see every day. Assembly Bill 255 will help hospitals and staff as they continue to provide great patient outcomes to Wisconsinites.

Thank you for time and I look forward to answering any questions members of this committee may have.

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PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: May 3rd, 2017
RE: Testimony on 2017 AB 255 and SB 162
TO: The Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Mining
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Thank you to Chairperson VanderMeer and the members of the committee for holding this hearing today on several bills from the Rural Wisconsin Initiative's spotlight on health care.

Assembly Bill 255 (AB 255) provides 100,000 dollars per year for quality improvement initiatives in Wisconsin's hospitals. These funds would be administered by the Wisconsin Hospital Association to increase participation by rural hospitals in the association's quality improvement activities and to increase their scope. This bill allows the WHA to remain flexible in the nature of these initiatives, so that they can respond to the needs of their members and the general public.

For instance, given the state's current opioid epidemic, they could choose to focus on the creation of a program that educates patients on the use of prescription painkillers, or they could utilize the funds to provide clinical simulation training programs for staff in smaller hospitals to improve their clinical skills with patients they may see in lower volumes. These are just a few examples of the types of additional services that could be provided through state support of the quality improvement program.

These tools are especially valuable for rural hospitals that may have fewer resources available to them to follow and implement certain quality improvement practices. Hospitals in Wisconsin look to WHA for support and guidance around various topics of quality improvement. This work is conducted in close partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

By increasing the quality of care, we can cut down on return visits to medical facilities, providing savings in the future. Wisconsin hospitals have an excellent reputation for providing patient-centered care, and this bill will help them further develop practices that help make us well, and keep us well. Thank you for your consideration – I hope you'll join me in support of this bill.

WISCONSIN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION, INC.



Date: May 3, 2017
To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Mining
From: Kelly Court, Chief Quality Officer
Re: WHA Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 255

On behalf of nearly 140 member hospitals, thank you Chair VanderMeer and members of the Committee for hearing Assembly Bill 255 – which will provide additional resources to the Wisconsin Hospital Association's (WHA) nationally-recognized quality improvement program. The Wisconsin Hospital Association, which has existed since 1920, not only serves as a leading voice in health care policy in Wisconsin, but also in supporting all of Wisconsin's hospitals in improving the quality of care they provide to their patients. In 2014, WHA's quality improvement program received the American Hospital Association Dick Davidson Award, in recognition of WHA's leadership in this area.

Since 2008, WHA has provided in-house quality improvement staff to address a variety of quality-related initiatives for our state's hospitals and health care providers. These include educational programs for Quality Improvement Directors and other members of the patient's care team, including physicians. Each year, our organization surveys our membership and conducts an environmental scan of quality-related issues at the state and national level, along with input from the Department of Health Services' Division of Public Health. This information is used to create WHA's strategic quality improvement plan and maximize participation in our program.

WHA's quality improvement program is funded through support from the Wisconsin Hospital Association Foundation, federal grants and has received one-time funding from the state. Because of its impact on the health care delivered to all of Wisconsin's residents and its close partnership with the Division of Public Health, our quality program serves a unique public good. We strongly support additional, ongoing state support for our program to expand our services and increase participation by rural hospitals.

WHA is uniquely positioned to use state resources to increase participation by and broaden the scope of hospital quality work provided to rural hospitals. We see a level of engagement by rural hospitals that is uncommon in most other states. Oftentimes our rural members have fewer internal resources, therefore they often rely more heavily on assistance from WHA quality staff than do their larger, urban counterparts.

Every year, WHA publishes a quality report – highlighting the successes of our quality program but also areas that continue to need improvement. This report is already provided on an annual basis to all members of the state legislature, along with bipartisan staff and legislator briefings on our program's results. As a leader in health care quality transparency, WHA also publicly reports quality data through our online web tool CheckPoint for consumers to compare quality results by hospital.

Assembly Bill 255 will build on the successful work we have already accomplished by providing WHA with additional resources to expand the scope of the Association's quality improvement program and encourage more rural hospitals to take advantage of our nationally-recognized quality initiatives.