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# PATRICK SNYDER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 656 *Assembly Committee on Health* January 6, 2022

Chairman Sanfelippo, and members of the committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill (AB) 656. Unfortunately, do to some last minute schedule conflicts the authors are unable to be here today but as a co-author I am happy to testify on behalf of this important legislation.

You have probably heard from your constituents at some point about concerns regarding Wisconsin's rising physician shortage. This can be especially harmful to rural residents living in one of the 105 federal Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas across 71 of Wisconsin's 72 counties without adequate access to primary care physicians. It's clear that we need to start taking steps to help alleviate this shortfall. With that said, it's also important to note that while this bill is focused on getting rural residents more care, there is this primary care shortage across most of the state.

We have a proposal before you today that provides a pathway for internationally-trained physicians to practice in Wisconsin without having to redo their residency programs by allowing the state Medical Examining Board to recognize high-quality education and residency programs they have already completed. This proposal would increase the amount of skilled internationally-trained physicians in Wisconsin, which would in-turn improve rural healthcare and assist in stopping the rising physician shortage in our state.

Currently, AB 656 holds a list of countries with medical standards deemed to qualified; the same list of countries that Canada allows. After the Senate hearing on this legislation, we have been working with the Medical Examining Board to address their concerns. We want to ensure this list is appropriate, the accrediting authority is accurate, and ultimately, Wisconsinites do not lose *quality* to gain *quantity*.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify in support of AB 656. I look forward to continuing the conversation and seeing your support on this important legislation.



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# MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

## **Testimony on Assembly Bill 656**

Assembly Committee on Health

Senator Mary Felzkowski

12<sup>th</sup> Senate District

January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Good afternoon Chair Sanfelippo and Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Assembly Bill 656, relating to the qualification of international medical graduates to practice medicine in the state of Wisconsin.

It is no secret that we have a physician shortage in our state, a shortage that is acutely pronounced in rural areas of our state like the Northwoods. Studies project that Wisconsin will need 5,500 new physicians by the year 2030, a goal we are not on track to meet. Through our time in the Legislature, I think we can all say we have been proud of the efforts we've taken to address this issue, from tuition reimbursements to rural placement credits. I've been especially pleased with our state's concentrated efforts to attract students in middle and high school towards STEM courses that lead to careers in medicine. The puzzle to address the shortage is not complete however, and today I'd like to talk to you about what I think is a missing piece- attracting qualified doctors, trained overseas, to come work in Wisconsin.

AB 656 lays out a framework for stripping back some of the unnecessary red tape and duplicative requirements international physicians currently face when they apply to work in our state, without compromising safety and quality of care. More importantly, AB 656 serves to begin the discussion on, "How can we make this process simple and clear, both for international medical graduates coming to Wisconsin, and also for their accrediting bodies?"

The bill will allow Wisconsin's Medical Examining Board the ability to recognize international graduate medical education and residency programs that either meet or exceed Wisconsin's standards, and permit those graduates the ability to start practicing in our state without having to redo their residency programs. I want to take a moment to note that the bill does contain a list of countries whose medical standards have been deemed to be qualified-that list is the list of countries Canada recognizes in this manner, and I am more than happy to work with the Medical Examining Board to expand or contract that list.

To answer questions that have come up regarding 'compromising safety' or 'lower quality of care', this bill does not lower or remove any national or state standard for a practicing internationally educated physician- they are held to the same standards as every other physician in this state. Currently, there are over 250,000 internationally-trained doctors

working across the United States-that is 25% of all doctors in America. Studies have shown that internationally-trained physicians are disproportionately more likely to serve in low-income communities, and additional studies of Medicare patients have proven that patients treated by international graduates have equal or better results when compared to patients treated by U.S. graduates.

As I stated before, I think this is one piece of the puzzle that our state needs to look at, and results from international medical graduates practicing as physicians in the United States show we would be remiss to ignore the potential of opening the door to these doctors.

I want to thank my co-author, Representative Callahan for his work on this legislation, and I want to thank every health care group that has reached out to engage in this discussion and offer critiques and suggestions. I look forward to working with everyone so we can create a clear pathway for international medical graduates to come join our workforce and live in our beautiful state.