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STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony on Senate Bill 643

Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing and Forestry

Senator Mary Felzkowski

12th Senate District

October 27th, 2021

Good afternoon Vice-Chair Stafsholt and Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Senate Bill 643, 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.

SB 643 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, SB 643 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.



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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 643 *Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing, & Forestry* October 27, 2021

Members of the committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill (SB) 643. I appreciate Sen. Felzkowski's help in working on this important legislation with me.

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 Wisconsin's 105 federal Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas without adequate access to primary care physicians. It's clear that we need to start taking steps to help alleviate this shortfall.

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.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 643. I look forward to seeing your support on this important legislation



WISCONSIN ACADEMY
of
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

To: Chairperson Felzkowski
Members, Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing and Forestry

From: Jamie Silkey, PA-C, President

Date: October 27, 2021

Re: 2021 Senate Bill 643, relating to qualification of international medical graduates to practice medicine and surgery.

2021 Senate Bill (SB) 643 would change some of the requirements for graduates of certain foreign medical colleges to practice as a physician in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Academy of Physicians Assistants generally supports initiatives to expand access to care in Wisconsin and to help Wisconsin attract more health care professionals to practice here.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Academy of Physician Assistants, I respectfully request physician assistants who are graduates of qualified foreign physician assistant programs be eligible to practice in Wisconsin, too, provided they meet all other qualifications to practice in Wisconsin.

Under current law, physician assistants, with few exceptions, must graduate from a physician assistant program accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistants. To allow graduates of a qualified foreign physician assistant programs to practice in Wisconsin, please amend SB 643 to allow the Physician Assistant Affiliated Credentialing Board – via rulemaking – to designate a foreign physician assistant program as “substantially equivalent” to an educational program accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistants. All other requirements to practice in Wisconsin would remain the same for a foreign graduate, that is, the graduate would have to pass the national accreditation examination required of domestic graduates, as well as the requirement in SB 643 that the graduate can speak English fluently and is lawfully admitted to work in the United States.

Empowering the Physician Assistant Affiliated Credentialing Board to determine which foreign programs are substantially equivalent to domestic programs would help ensure the quality of education, the quality of care, and the level of patient safety would continue to meet the standards set in Wisconsin. And requiring that this be done via rulemaking would ensure appropriate legislative oversight of which foreign programs are deemed substantially equivalent to domestic programs.

Physician assistants, whether educated domestically or in a qualified foreign program, would continue to practice as part of healthcare teams alongside other providers, such as physicians. Physician assistants have long served to expand access to care, particularly in rural Wisconsin, and allowing foreign educated physician assistants – provided they, too, pass the national accreditation examination – could also help Wisconsin address its looming shortage of primary care physicians.

If you have any questions, please contact R.J. Pirlot of the Hamilton Consulting Group at 608-258-9506.