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# JON PLUMER

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 42<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony – **Assembly Bill 292**– Relating to: composition of local boards of health

## **Assembly Committee on Health** **July 29, 2021**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this common-sense legislation. Assembly Bill 292 allows local health boards more flexibility when it comes to appointing members.

Currently, state statute requires local health boards to have at least three members who are not elected officials or employees of the governing body that establishes the local health department and “have a demonstrated interest or competence in the field of public health or community health.” Additionally, the appointing authority must make a “good faith effort” to appoint a registered nurse and physician to two of those three spots.

Finding individuals with the specified credentials and a willingness to volunteer their time to serve on a health board can be difficult, especially in rural areas of the state where the number of practitioners can be limited. Assembly Bill 292 says that if a physician and/or registered nurse cannot be found to serve on a health board, a good faith effort must be made to appoint a physician assistant or advanced practice registered nurse to the board in their place. Physician assistants and advance practice nurses are valuable members of our health care teams and more than qualified to serve on our local health boards. This legislation simply gives our local governments one more option when it comes to appointing members to their local health boards.

Assembly Bill 292 has support from the major stakeholders in public health boards:

- League of Wisconsin Municipalities
- Wisconsin Counties Association
- Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards
- Wisconsin Public Health Association

I look forward to your support of this common sense legislation. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

**STATE SENATOR KATHY BERNIER**  
TWENTY-THIRD SENATE DISTRICT



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**From: Senator Kathy Bernier**  
**To: The Assembly Committee on Health**  
**Re: Testimony on Assembly Bill 292**  
**Relating to: composition of local boards of health**

**Date: July 29, 2021**

Thank you Chairman Sanfelippo and committee members for allowing me to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 292 regarding the composition of local boards of health.

Under the current law, local health boards are required to appoint a licensed physician and a registered nurse to the board. In some rural areas of Wisconsin, finding available doctors and nurses with time to volunteer for these roles can be difficult. This bill helps fill these vacancies by expanding the list of eligible appointees to include physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses.

While appointing authorities would still be required to first seek out RNs or physicians, this bill provides an alternate solution for health boards who are struggling to appoint medical professionals. Physician assistants and advanced practice nurses are more than qualified for health board positions. Their education, patient experience, and case assessment skills qualify them to fulfill all of the prescribed duties of board members. This bill allows for local health boards to fill long-standing vacancies in rural areas while also allowing Wisconsin's hard-working, competent PA's and RN's to serve their communities in this needed way.

Thank you once again for hearing Assembly Bill 292. I hope you will join me in support of this important change, as Wisconsin communities deserve governing health bodies that are fully staffed by capable people.

**Assembly Committee on Health**  
**Public Comment for AB 292**  
**July 29, 2021**

Hello, my name is Denise Brusveen. I reside near Poynette, WI, and I serve on the Columbia County Board of Supervisors. Additionally, I am a member of our county's Health and Human Services Committee, or as you might refer to it – our local board of health. I am here today in support of AB292.

I feel that it is important to have medical representation on our county health boards, but current state law restricts the potential value of this representation. In my county, we have many good doctors and registered nurses, but it can be difficult to find individuals who want to serve on our committee.

Just last fall, a doctor from another county was appointed by our county board chair to serve as the physician on our health committee because he said he was unable to find anyone residing in our county that met the current statutory requirement to fill the position. Meanwhile, there were multiple able and willing individuals who both reside and work in our county as licensed healthcare providers who could have filled that role if their credentials were also acknowledged in state statute.

I think this bill takes us a step in the right direction by expanding who counties may consider, but in order to make it even better, I urge you to amend this bill to put physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses on the same level as physicians and registered nurses.

Thus, it would read, "In appointing the members who are not elected officials or employees, a good faith effort shall be made to appoint a registered nurse and a physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse.

Our counties are already making a good faith effort to locate a physician and a registered nurse. It hasn't been my experience that locating a nurse is the problem. The problem is in locating a physician. I have yet to meet the physician that was appointed to my county's committee eight months ago. I would much rather have someone who is living in our community and engaged in our committee than someone who is simply filling a statutory requirement.

Amending this bill as I just mentioned would greatly expand our options from within each county to meet its unique needs. For example, in my county, our health committee is combined with human services. Thus if given the choice between a physician assistant who works in family practice vs an emergency room doctor, anesthesiologist, or surgeon, the choice would be easy for me. The physician assistant would be exposed to a much wider range of types of people, health issues, and family dynamics as well as just plain more people in general and would likely be a more valuable advisor for our committee. But the way this bill is written, each of the doctors would still need to be prioritized over individuals with other credentials.

Thus, I ask you to please pass this bill with the amendment I have proposed so that we have greater flexibility in our counties to meet our needs and benefit our residents. Thank you.