



ALEX A. DALLMAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 41ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Favor of Assembly Bill 255

Assembly Committee on Rural Development

November 8, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Armstrong and committee members, for allowing me to testify before you on Assembly Bill 255, which would create a rural pharmacy practice grant program administered by the Higher Educational Aids Board.

The Rural Pharmacy Incentive Program aims to encourage graduates from Wisconsin's three Schools of Pharmacy (Concordia University, UW Madison, and Medical College of WI) to serve in rural communities. This bill would create a small pilot program administered by the Higher Educational Aids Board for graduates to offset the cost of higher education by committing to practice in rural communities over three years.

Currently, the average amount of debt that a student accrues from a School of Pharmacy is approximately \$180,000. This pilot program would provide ten students up to \$30,000 per year, for three years, if they commit to serve in an underserved area for three years after graduation.

For those of us that live in rural communities, we have seen a decrease in access to quality healthcare because the number of healthcare providers are shrinking. It is very common for a pharmacist to be the closest care provider to the people, even more so than a primary care provider. With our aging demographics, it is vitally important that we remain committed as a state to keep access to quality healthcare. AB 255 will specifically work to alleviate the growing healthcare gap and increase access in our rural communities.

Thank you again, Chairman Armstrong, for the opportunity to testify before this committee today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



ROB STAFSHOLT

STATE SENATOR • 10th SENATE DISTRICT

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P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

DATE: November 8, 2023
RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 255
TO: Members of the Committee on Rural Development
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt

Thank you Chairman Armstrong and members of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development for hearing Assembly Bill 255 relating to creating a rural pharmacy practice grant program administered by the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB), exempting from taxation amounts received from such a grant program, and granting rule-making authority.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, most of Wisconsin's rural areas like my district suffered from a lack of care providers in healthcare. The quality is there, but the number of care providers is dwindling. The reasons for labor shortages are many across all healthcare fields, and our goal is to specifically address the rural pharmacy issue with this bill.

One potential solution to address the goal of improved access and improved community outcomes would be to incentivize graduates from Wisconsin's schools of Pharmacy to serve in rural/underserved communities upon graduation.

We are proposing legislation that would create a small, simple, pilot grant program administered by the Higher Educational Aids Board for graduates to offset the cost of higher education with a commitment to practice in rural/underserved communities for three years.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify on Assembly Bill 255. I would appreciate your support on this piece of legislation and would be happy to answer any questions.



DATE: November 8, 2023

TO: Representative David Armstrong, Chairman
Assembly Committee on Rural Development

FROM: Danielle Womack, Vice President of Public Affairs
Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin

SUBJECT: Support of Assembly Bill 255

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony supporting Assembly Bill 255. On behalf of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin, we appreciate Senator Stafsholt and Representative Dallman's support of rural pharmacy practice.

Pharmacists play a unique role in healthcare teams as doctorally trained experts in medication management. Not only do pharmacists dispense prescription medications, but they also administer vaccinations and injectable medications such as those used for opioid use disorder, conduct comprehensive medication management, provide smoking cessation services, and order and interpret lab tests.

Upon graduation from pharmacy school, the average graduate has approximately \$180,000 in student debt. Unfortunately, due to the need to repay this debt, most new pharmacists choose to practice in urban or suburban areas, where salaries are often higher -- leading to a disproportionate lack of pharmacist providers in rural areas. In order to address this student loan debt and encourage new graduates to practice in rural and often underserved areas, AB 255 would provide ten recent graduates up to \$30,000 per year for three years if they commit to practicing in a medically underserved area for three years.

By promoting rural pharmacy practice through student debt grants, AB 255 will encourage pharmacists, with their extensive medication expertise, to serve in rural areas as part of the integrated healthcare team. Studies have shown that pharmacist interventions for patients with chronic conditions save an average of \$1,000 per patient annually. If 10 pharmacists intervene for 30 patients each over three years, the investment of this bill will pay for itself.

By promoting pharmacist practice in rural areas, AB 255 will allow pharmacists to serve as patient care providers, improve patients' experiences and health outcomes, lower costs, and increase equity and access to care for Wisconsinites.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at dwomack@pswi.org.

November 8, 2023

Assembly Committee on Rural Development
415 NW Main St.
Madison, WI 53703

Chairman Armstrong and members of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development,

My name is Dr. Erik Jorvig and I am Dean of the Concordia University School of Pharmacy. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of AB 255 to help support access for rural pharmacy services. Pharmacists remain the most accessible healthcare provider especially for our rural communities. In many rural communities, a pharmacist may be the only accessible healthcare provider available within a reasonable driving distance. Pharmacists are highly trained and imminently capable health care providers. Especially as seen during the pandemic, pharmacists are ready and willing to provide quality healthcare services to their communities on a variety of issues including immunization delivery, medication management, chronic disease management and prevention, among others. Coupled with the recent passage of the pharmacist provider status in 2021 Act 98 legislation, pharmacists are more than ever capable of practicing as a mid-level primary care provider positively affecting the healthcare outlook for rural communities.

The main difficulty for rural communities has been enticing pharmacy graduates to explore rural pharmacy as a career option. Many pharmacy graduates, even those originating from rural areas, choose to relocate to urban settings with the impression of more pharmacy job opportunities, higher pay and more career advancement. This is despite the pressing need for pharmacy services of the rural communities from which they come.

This bill creates an affordable incentive system to offset the departure of these highly skilled graduates to urban settings. With graduation debt in excess of \$180,000, the ability to qualify for loan repayment can be a great incentive for these pharmacy graduates to reconsider practicing pharmacy in a rural setting to provide care and connect with those communities. Quality provision of healthcare by pharmacists is known to decrease overall healthcare costs, by decreasing medication related waste, duplication and adverse events, while increasing overall quality of care. This healthcare cost savings can be anticipated to offset the initial cost of this program. In that way, everyone wins: the rural communities have increased access and quality of healthcare; the pharmacy graduates have a financial incentive to choose rural pharmacy practice and the state of Wisconsin can achieve those goals through minimal initial cost.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express my support for AB 255.

Sincerely,

Dr. Erik Jorvig