



DATE: November 15, 2023

RE: Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 665

TO: Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care

FROM: Rep. Angie Sapik

Thank you, Chairman Moses and esteemed Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care colleagues. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the critical importance of 2023 AB 665 and its impact on improving access to dental care in rural Wisconsin.

The shortage of dental professionals in rural areas of our state has been a longstanding issue, and we must take proactive steps to address this disparity. With less than a quarter of dentists practicing in primarily rural counties, while 30 percent of our population resides in these areas, it is evident that there is a pressing need to incentivize and support the recruitment and training of dentists who are willing to serve these underserved communities. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 46 full Wisconsin Counties are federally designated as dental health professional shortage areas, including Douglas, Burnett, and Washburn counties that make up my 73rd Assembly District. There are also 12 Wisconsin Counties with a partial or Tribal Health Center federally designated as dental health professional shortage area.

2023 AB 665 aims to define and address dental health shortage areas, providing scholarships for students who commit to practicing in these areas for a specified period. This initiative, along with the allocation of funds to support the recruitment and training of students in rural dentistry, represents a significant step forward in addressing the shortage of dental professionals in rural Wisconsin.

This legislation will create a tangible impact by establishing a pipeline of dentists for rural Wisconsin, thus addressing the distribution issue of dentists in our state. The funding provided to the Marquette University School of Dentistry (MUSOD) will pave the way for establishing clinical rotations to provide vital oral health care services in underserved rural communities. This legislation will improve access to dental care and contribute to the overall health and well-being of rural Wisconsin residents.

I urge my fellow committee members to support 2023 AB 665 and help ensure that this important legislation moves forward to address the pressing need for improved dental access in rural Wisconsin. I understand that a representative from Marquette University is here to testify on behalf of the School of Dentistry if there are more detailed questions about this program.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this crucial matter.



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TONY KURTZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony before Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care
Rep. Tony Kurtz
Assembly Bill 665**

Good morning, Chairman Moses and Members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care. Thank you for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 665 relating to: scholarships for Marquette University School of Dentistry students who practice in dental health shortage areas. I want to extend my appreciation to my co-authors Rep. Sapik and Sen. Testin for leading on this important issue.

AB-665 modifies a scholarship awarded by the Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) to apply to students enrolled in the Marquette University School of Dentistry. This modification is consistent with the legislative intent from the 2019-2021 state budget. After Governor Evers vetoed the language, I authored 2019 AB-258 to make modifications very similar to what is in the bill before you today. 2019 AB-258 passed the Assembly, 95-2 in January of 2020; unfortunately, due to COVID-19 we were unable to get the bill across the finish line before session ended. I am hopeful this legislation will once again have broad bi-partisan support and become law.

AB-665 modifies the program to apply only to Wisconsin resident students enrolled at the Marquette University School of Dentistry who agree to practice dentistry in a dental health shortage area for 18 months for each annual scholarship received. The bill defines a "dental health shortage area" as an area federally designated as having a shortage of dental professionals, not including Brown, Dane, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Waukesha counties. According to DHS, 46 counties are federally designated as dental health professional shortage areas. Additionally, there are also 12 counties with a partial or Tribal Health Center federally designated as dental health professional shortage areas. According to DHS, at least 20 of these counties need less than a single dentist to reduce the shortage for Medicaid members. An additional 13 counties need less than two dentists to reduce the shortage for Medicaid members. The 50th State Assembly District, which includes Juneau and parts of Richland, Sauk, and Vernon counties, would all qualify as dental health professional shortage areas under this legislation.

AB-665 also specifies that HEAB may award no more than 15 students an annual scholarship of \$30,000 annually for up to four years. A student who fails to meet their obligation to practice in a dental health shortage area must repay the scholarships as required under current law. The bill also requires HEAB to provide \$350,000 annually by modifying existing state funds to develop and operate programs to support the recruitment and training of students in rural dentistry. It's important to note, AB-665 does not include any new funding. Instead, this legislation utilizes the existing funding appropriation to make these proposed modifications. The funding provided to the Marquette University School of Dentistry will allow the school, which already serves citizens of Wisconsin from 66 out of the state's 72 counties, to provide additional patient care through dental educational clinical rotations. This program will be a win-win for Wisconsinites and our future dental workforce.

I understand that Ms. Mary Czech-Mrochinski from Marquette University is here to testify on behalf of the School of Dentistry if there are more detailed questions about this program. I respectfully request your support of Assembly Bill 665 and thank you for the opportunity to testify before all of you today.



PATRICK TESTIN STATE SENATOR

DATE: November 15, 2023

RE: **Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 665**
TO: The Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Thank you to Chairman Moses and Committee Members for hearing this bill.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 46 full Wisconsin Counties are federally designated as dental health professional shortage areas, including Wood, Jackson, Adams, Waushara, and Monroe counties, as well as all of Portage County counties that make up my 24th Senate District. There are also 12 Wisconsin Counties with a partial or Tribal Health Center federally designated as dental health professional shortage area. According to the Department, at least 20 of these counties need less than a single dentist to reduce the shortage for Medicaid members.

Current law requires HEAB, in consultation with the Department of Health Services, to establish a scholarship program for state residents who enter into an agreement with HEAB to practice in a health shortage area in this state upon graduation. HEAB may award an annual scholarship for each year of an eligible student's enrollment, up to four years, and the eligible student must agree to practice in a health shortage area for 18 months for each annual scholarship the student receives. If the student fails to meet this obligation, the student must repay the scholarships based on a specified calculation.

AB 665 modifies the program to apply only to Wisconsin resident students enrolled at the Marquette University School of Dentistry who agree to practice dentistry in a dental health shortage area for 18 months for each annual scholarship received. The bill defines a "dental health shortage area" as an area federally designated as having a shortage of dental professionals, not including Brown, Dane, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Waukesha counties. Under the bill, HEAB may award no more than 15 students an annual scholarship of \$30,000 annually for up to four years. A student who fails to meet their obligation to practice in a dental health shortage area for the requisite period must repay the scholarships as required under current law. The bill also requires HEAB to provide MUSOD \$350,000 annually by modifying existing state funds to develop and operate programs to support the recruitment and training of students in rural dentistry.

It is important to note that AB 665 does not appropriate any additional state funding and instead utilizes the existing funding appropriation to make these proposed modifications.

This legislation is needed so that dentists are incentivized to settle in rural communities like mine.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of AB 665



**Assembly Bill 665 - Scholarships for Marquette University School of
Dentistry Students Who Practice in Dental Shortage Areas
WAFCC Written Testimony
Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care
November 15, 2023**

Chairman Moses, Vice Chair Rozar, Members of the Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care. Thank you for entertaining my written comments today.

My name is Dennis Skrajewski and I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of Free & Charitable Clinics. Our small, non-profit organization exists to support, strengthen and advocate for Wisconsin's free and charitable clinics (FCCs), the patients they serve and the communities with whom they partner. There are 95 free and charitable clinics throughout Wisconsin who provide medical, dental and behavioral health care to >160,000 Wisconsinites annually. Please note that FCCs are not Community Health Centers/Federally Qualified Health Centers. We do not receive funding from the Federal government. FCCs survive through community support, foundation grants, and copious volunteers who give so generously of their time.

I'm writing today in support of Assembly Bill 665 – Scholarships for Marquette University School of Dentistry Students Who Practice in Dental Shortage Areas. Quite simply, given the current shortage and maldistribution of dentists, WAFCC, support this additional investment in dentists committed to practice in Dental Shortage Areas including the state's free and charitable clinics. This investment will aid in improving access to dental services by the uninsured and underinsured citizens of our state.

We strongly support the passage of Assembly Bill 665 – Scholarships for Marquette University School of Dentistry Students Who Practice in Dental Shortage Areas. Thank you Chairman Moses, Vice Chair Rozar and Committee Members for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis Skrajewski

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