



Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 667 Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-term Care Wednesday, November 15, 2023

Thank you to the members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-term Care for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 667. This important piece of legislation will further enable our Technical Colleges to access \$20 million in one-time grant funding to expand our state's oral healthcare workforce.

The current shortage of dental providers spans nearly the entire state. According to information from the Wisconsin Dental Association, in 2022, forty-nine percent of dental offices were trying to recruit a dental hygienist, forty-two percent of the offices were trying to recruit a dental assistant, and nearly half of dental offices have had to cut hours because of staffing shortages.

Additionally, the majority of technical colleges have waitlists for these programs, and dental hygiene programs are typically the highest-cost programs with the lowest student ratios, creating a more unique barrier to the creation and expansion of these programs. Due to the high need and unique barriers presented in expanding oral healthcare programs, there was \$20 million set aside in the 2023-25 State Budget for the purpose of expanding Wisconsin's dental programs at our technical colleges.

This bill provides parameters for release of the funding to the Technical College System Board for this purpose, which include:

- Safeguards to ensure the dollars are being spent appropriately and for the intended purpose, such as reporting requirements and Joint Finance Committee approval
- A fair and transparent formula which allows equal opportunity for technical colleges across the state to potentially access the funds
- Matching requirements so that our technical colleges also have some skin in the game when making these investments
- The allowance of one-time expenditures for capital buildouts, such as new dental chairs and facility improvements and expansions, instructional supplies, and instructor hiring bonuses

While this legislation puts in place these important parameters on use of the funds, the plan still will need final approval from the Joint Committee on Finance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on AB 667. Our dental partners are desperate for opportunities to increase the pipeline of oral healthcare workforce so I hope you can join me in support this important piece of legislation.



MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony on AB 667

Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care

Senator Mary Felzkowski

12th Senate District

November 15th, 2023

Good morning Chairman Moses and Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Assembly Bill 667, which would establish the framework to provide our technical colleges with \$20 million to invest in Wisconsin's oral healthcare workforce.

In the 2023-25 State Budget, the Legislature included \$20 million in one-time funding for our technical colleges to expand oral health care programs on their campuses and allow for the training of more dental hygienists, dental assistants and other oral healthcare providers.

64 of Wisconsin's 72 counties are designated as dental access shortage areas. Practicing dentists in these areas state that one of their key impediments in providing services to Wisconsinites living in these areas is a severe shortage in hygienists, assistants, and other supporting members of the dental care team. This staff shortage crisis has led to higher costs and longer wait times for patients receiving dental care.

The majority of technical colleges have waitlists for the programs that train these providers, and dental hygiene programs are typically the highest-cost programs with the lowest student ratios, creating a more unique barrier to the creation and expansion of these programs. These programs are ripe for, and could greatly benefit from, a one-time infusion of dollars, which have already been set aside in the budget, to increase access to this important workforce pipeline.

This bill provides the parameters under which the Technical College System can use and apply for these grant dollars. The bill puts in place a fair and transparent formula for the use of the dollars, ensuring equal opportunity for technical colleges across the state that may have an interest in expanding their oral healthcare programs, or starting new provider programs, while also detailing the eligible types of expenditures allowed. You will hear from some of the technical colleges today on how they plan to use these funds.

Based on the parameters specified in the bill, the Technical College System Board would submit a plan for expenditure of the funds to the Joint Committee on Finance, which would need to sign off on the plan.

This bill is a significant step towards increasing the number of oral health care providers in our state and we hope to gain your support as a committee for this legislation. Representative Melotik and I will be happy to take any questions.



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Assembly Bill 667
Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care
November 15, 2023

Chairman Moses and Members of the Committee:

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) asks for your support for Assembly Bill 667. This bill specifies parameters related to the \$20 million one-time investment in oral health care programs at technical colleges provided in the 2023-25 biennial budget. This pivotal investment will allow colleges to expand capacity in their in-demand oral health care programs and contribute a skilled workforce to the dental industry.

Fourteen technical colleges currently offer dental assistant programs, enrolling more than 600 students per year. In addition, half of all technical colleges offer dental hygienist programs, enrolling more than 1,300 students per year and producing strong outcomes. WTCS dental hygienist graduates experience a 97% employment rate in their field within six months of graduation and earn competitive, family-supporting salaries. More details can be found in the WTCS 2022 Graduate Outcomes Report:

<https://www.wtcsystem.edu/assets/Uploads/Publications/Report/WTCS-2022-Graduate-Outcomes.pdf>

These high-quality, industry-aligned oral health care programs are equipment and facilities intensive. Students receive hands-on educational experiences in on-site clinic settings that mirror their future workplaces. Dental chairs and facility improvements such as floor trenching and waterlines are required to expand program capacity. Additional funding will help technical colleges continue to invest in equipment, facilities and supplies that support the expansion of oral health programming capacity and produce real-world clinic experiences that prepare students to succeed.

The strength of WTCS oral health care programs is driven in part by the experts in the dental field that serve as faculty and clinic supervisors. Without dentists and dental professionals to lend their expertise in the classroom and the clinics, students are limited in their ability to complete their coursework and move into the workforce. Competitive faculty salaries are essential for recruiting and retaining industry experts and sustaining programming capacity. Additional funding to pay hiring bonuses to oral health care instructors supports colleges in their efforts to address their own skilled talent shortages and incentivizes more dental experts to educate WTCS students, ensuring students are work-ready for this essential industry.

Please support Assembly Bill 667 and the support it provides for WTCS colleges' work to produce a skilled oral health care workforce for Wisconsin. Thank you for your consideration.

COLLEGES: Blackhawk, Chippewa Valley, Fox Valley, Gateway, Lakeshore, Madison College, Mid-State, Milwaukee Area, Moraine Park, Nicolet College, Northcentral, Northeast Wisconsin, Northwood Tech, Southwest Tech, Waukesha County, Western



November 15, 2023

Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long Term Care
Layla Merrifield, Executive Director, WTCDBA

AB-667 - Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs
AB-668 - Licensure of Dental Therapists

Thank you, Chairman Moses, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak today. Wisconsin's technical colleges ask for your support for this package of bills to expand and support the oral health care workforce pipeline.

Technical colleges currently operate eight dental hygiene programs and 14 dental assistant programs, either as short-term technical diplomas or one-year CODA programs. Employment rates for these graduates range from 96% to 99%, six months after graduation. We know from our employer-partners that even more graduates are needed, and every year, we have more qualified students than we can accommodate in our hygienist programs. We also know that most of Wisconsin's counties are considered dental health shortage areas, and simply don't have enough dentists, hygienists, or assistants.

That shortage is pervasive in rural northern, western, and central Wisconsin counties. North-central Technical College (NTC) is uniquely well-situated to help address these shortages, headquartered as they are in Wausau, with successful hygiene and assistant programs, ready and willing to expand into dental therapy. Thanks to NTC President Jeannie Worden for being here today to speak to the community need that she is seeing.

On the other hand, dental education is uniquely challenging to provide at scale. Our students receive hands-on education from industry experts, who have years of experience as working dentists. Accreditation standards mandate that clinical process courses have student-faculty ratios no higher than 5 to 1 for hygienists, or 6 to 1 for assistants. Each student requires dedicated lab space to practice their skills. All of these factors contribute to operating costs of up to \$30,000 per year, per hygiene student. Dental chairs and other operatory equipment are highly specialized and capital-intensive. Even modestly-sized labs cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to properly equip, and easily surpass \$1 million when necessary facility improvements are included. At the same time, technical colleges are also hearing growing demands for more qualified graduates in health care programs, IT, skilled trades, manufacturing, emergency responders, and many other fields. We are increasingly challenged to meet each of these needs.

We appreciate our partners, particularly the bill authors, the Joint Finance Committee, and the Wisconsin Dental Association. We thank them for their ongoing support and collaboration on behalf of oral health programs offered by technical colleges. Thanks also to the Marquette dental school, rural public health advocates, and Wisconsin's community health centers, and all who have worked tirelessly toward the shared goal of access to dental care for all Wisconsinites. We ask for this committee's support to continue this important work. Thank you.



**Assembly Bill 667 – Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs
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 here today in support of Assembly Bill 667 – Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs. The up to \$20,000,000 funding for the 2023-25 fiscal biennium is an excellent investment in our dental workforce and is intelligently structured to maximize the investment. Given the current shortages in our dental workforce this investment appears quite prudent.

WAFCC strongly supports the passage of Assembly Bill 667 – Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs. Thank you Chairman Moses, Vice Chair Rozar and Committee Members for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis Skrajewski

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To: Chair Moses
Assembly Committee on Health, Aging, and Long-Term Care

Re: Assembly Bill 667, Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs

Chair Moses and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding a hearing on multiple oral health bills today, including AB 667, Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs. On behalf of the 19 Community Health Centers in Wisconsin, WPHCA supports AB 667 as one essential tool to address workforce challenges and ultimately improve oral health access and outcomes in Wisconsin.

WPHCA is the membership organization for the 19 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs or Health Centers) in Wisconsin. Community Health Centers are non-profit, community-directed medical, dental, and behavioral health providers. In 2022, Community Health Centers served nearly 300,000 patients in communities throughout the state, including patients from every county. One in five patients lack insurance, and 70% of patients are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is \$30,000 for a family of four. Since 2008, Community Health Centers have tripled their dental capacity to answer the call of Wisconsinites who are living without oral health care; over one-third of Community Health Center visits are for dental care.

WPHCA surveyed our members in 2022 and the highest priority area across the board for staffing was dental team members, at all levels. This included vacancy rates of 33% for Hygienists, 31% for Dentists, and 28% for Dental Assistants (DAs). Community Health Centers report open positions for more than 100 dental team members across the state.

Community Health Centers are working to address this workforce challenge in multiple ways such as adjusting schedules for providers who want to work part time, training DAs in-house through apprenticeship programs, establishing career ladder programs, and collaborating with academic partners to develop new hands-on training programs in rural areas. They also host rotations for dental schools and collaborate for on-site learning.

However, these efforts are not enough. Many patients are waiting weeks or even months for care. This means that by the time they come in for a visit, issues are exacerbated or perhaps they are using the emergency room for care. We need a joint approach of making sure that all clinicians are practicing efficiently *and* adding more team members overall to meet the need in Wisconsin. Supporting oral health programs at Technical Colleges will expand the local "grow your own" strategy to train more oral health professionals to practice in their own communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information regarding the potential benefits for Community Health Centers and our patients, and for your consideration of AB 667.

Richelle Andrae

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ABOUT WPHCA:

WPHCA is the membership association for Wisconsin's 19 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) also known as Community Health Centers (CHCs). Community Health Centers work to create healthier communities by improving access, providing quality health care and reducing health disparities for Wisconsin's underserved and low-income populations. Our aim is to ensure that all Wisconsinites achieve their highest health potential. We execute our mission and focus our aim through providing training and technical assistance to Wisconsin's Community Health Centers and advocating on their behalf.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER WORKFORCE

January 2023

Wisconsin Community Health Centers employ over 1,300 medical, dental, and behavioral health staff providing primary care, behavioral health, and support services for 278,800 Wisconsin residents.

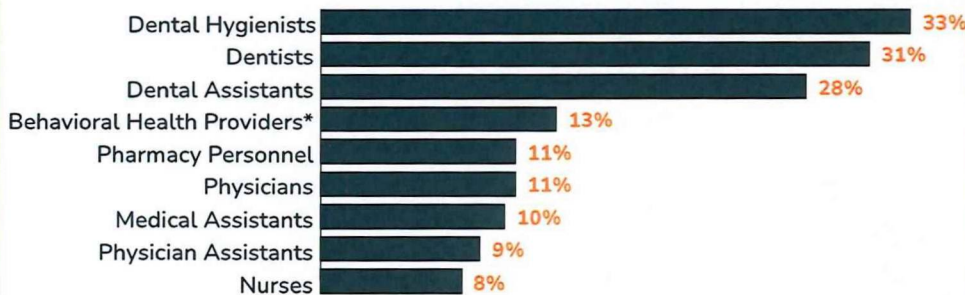
A top challenge to meeting community needs are critical workforce shortages inhibiting their ability to serve patients. **Staffing shortages for clinical providers such as Medical Assistants (MAs) and Dental Assistants (DAs), oral health staff, and behavioral health providers are most acute.**

Particularly in rural areas, the impact of each provider is especially significant. With one retirement or departure to another location, a whole community can lose access to care. Recruiting and retaining every single provider truly matters in a small community.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER EFFORTS

- Development of MA and DA apprenticeship programs for new entry-level providers
- Cross-sector collaboration to build a Teaching Health Center physician residency program
- Creation of career ladders to recruit and retain mission-oriented staff

WI Community Health Center Provider Vacancy Rates (July 2022, N=10 CHCs)



*Behavioral Health Providers include mental health and substance use treatment providers
Source: WI CHC Workforce Survey, July 2022. Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association

The dental team includes Dentists, Dental Hygienists, and DAs. Community Health Centers report open positions for **more than 100 dental team members** across these provider types.

WPHCA encourages policymakers to **explore all avenues to reduce barriers to health professions training in order to increase the total number of new providers in primary care professions.** This includes investments in UW system schools and technical colleges to hire and retain faculty, partner with health care entities for clinical training, and eliminate wait lists.

PUBLIC POLICY OPPORTUNITIES

- Pass Dental Therapy legislation in Wisconsin and provide funding for development of Dental Therapy academic programs
- Add funding and broaden eligibility for loan assistance programs for MAs and DAs
- Provide resources to increase exposure to health professions for high school students

Read WPHCA's complete Workforce Issue Brief online at <https://www.wphca.org/public-policy/issue-briefs-and-data>, which outlines additional efforts to strengthen the Community Health Center workforce and public policy opportunities.



To: Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long Term Care
From: Matt Crespin, MPH, RDH, Executive Director, Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin
Date: November 15, 2023
Re: Support for AB 667 – Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs

Good morning Chairman Moses and members of the committee. My name is Matt Crespin and I serve as the executive director at Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin (Alliance). Thank you for the opportunity to share with you remarks in support of Assembly Bill 667. Our organization along with a coalition of others were supportive of the \$20 million the legislature allocated to dental workforce education as part of this past year's budget. The dental workforce landscape has changed dramatically since the COVID19 pandemic and a variety of efforts are required to bolster the current workforce needs in our state and beyond.

The American Dental Association's (ADA) Health Policy Institute (HPI) has [published data](#)ⁱ showing that during the pandemic as many as 8% of the dental hygiene workforce left the profession in 2020, and nearly 5% in 2021 with half indicating they do not intend to return to the profession. Approximately 1/3 of dental hygienists and dental assistants indicated they intend to retire in the next five years. There are a variety of factors impacting this shift however now more than ever we need to invest in the oral health workforce infrastructure and ensure providers are all working at the top of their license.

With the potential addition of dental therapists to our state's workforce landscape it is critical we are able to promptly train this provider right here in Wisconsin. Recruiting from other states that train dental therapists will be challenging as currently in Minnesota there is virtually zero unemployment of dental therapists. Additionally, dental hygienists can now practice in a variety of settings without the supervision of a dentist as a result of Act 20 (2017). Dental hygienists can now work in a variety of new settings such as nursing homes, hospitals and medical offices. The Alliance has been leading efforts to integrate dental hygienists to work as part of the primary medical team and since 2019, has engaged 11 health centers and health systems in this work and have provided more than 17,200 patient visits. Ensuring a strong dental hygiene workforce can add to this existing body of work where we know that more than 70,000 children ages 0-5 enrolled in Medicaid visit a physician and not a dentist.

The Alliance leads and manages the Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition who has long advocated for greater opportunities to enhance and expand the dental workforce and this bill does exactly that. This funding is critical to ensure dental therapy education gets off the ground when AB 668 is signed in to law and supports the recruitment of educators to ensure we train dental hygienists and dental assistants to the highest standard. I would like to applaud the legislature's commitment to oral health in the past and particularly this session as we are here today discussion four different bills to enhance oral health in Wisconsin. We look forward to seeing AB 667 adopted and more importantly implemented through dedicated funding to bolster the oral health workforce.

Respectfully submitted: Matt Crespin, MPH, RDH, Executive Director, Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin,
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ⁱ https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental_workforce_shortages_labor_market.pdf