



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE SENATOR • 19TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health

Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara

December 7, 2023

Hello, members of the Senate Committee on Health. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on Senate Bill 671, a simple bill that will expand opportunities to get more trained professionals in the workforce.

Nationally, everyone is facing a significant health care professional shortage. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there was a gap of nearly 2,000,000 between hires and job openings in the health care sector and Wisconsin has an aging population exacerbating the problem.

Unnecessary regulatory burdens have also been a barrier to getting more professionals into the workforce. Currently, the Department of Health Services allows students to start working prior to taking their certification test, but only if they work full-time. This results in an untapped labor market of trained professionals that can fill critical gaps if they are unable to commit to 40+ hour work weeks.

Senate Bill 671 would allow these students to enter the workforce on a part-time basis prior to taking their exam. By making this small change, we can remove an unnecessary barrier and move folks into critical care settings more efficiently.

Thank you for your consideration. I am hopeful you are able to support this bi-partisan piece of legislation.



ROB SUMMERFIELD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 67th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT
MAJORITY CAUCUS CHAIR

December 7, 2023

Senator Cabral-Guevara, Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Health

Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 671 *Relating to: student qualification for employment as a nurse aide*

Senator Cabral-Guevara and Committee Members:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify at today's public hearing on Senate Bill 671. I appreciate your time and consideration of this legislation.

As many of us have seen throughout the state, Wisconsin's healthcare system is facing great workforce shortages. With healthcare being such an important industry for our society, we must do what we can to encourage more people to enter this field of work.

Many nurses and healthcare professionals start their careers as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). Being a CNA is a job that can be started at a younger age and can greatly help someone get ahead by gaining valuable healthcare experience.

Under current DHS administrative rule, **CNA students can start their employment as a CNA if they are hired as a *full-time employee* before taking their certification test, but not if they are hired as a *part-time employee*.**

This bill would allow a CNA student to be hired as a full-time **or** part-time employee without first taking their certification test. They must be supervised by a preceptor, would still have to complete 16 hours of classroom training, and be enrolled in an approved training program before being employed as a nurse aide.

Permitting students to work *part-time* could provide them the needed flexibility to work on their training hours which could possibly allow them to complete their training faster and chip away at the healthcare workforce shortage. I ask that you join me in supporting this bill.



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Kirsten L. Johnson, Secretary

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Health

FROM: Deb Standridge, Deputy Secretary
HJ Waukau, Legislative Director

DATE: December 7, 2023

RE: SB 671 relating to: student qualification for employment as a nurse aide

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 671 (SB 671), relating to student qualification for employment as a nurse aide. SB 671 would strengthen Wisconsin's health care workforce by allowing a student to work as a nurse aide if the student is employed part-time as a nurse's assistant, home health aide, or hospice aide in a hospital, nursing home, intermediate care facility for persons with an intellectual disability, home health agency, or hospice. SB 671 would require students to have a preceptor and to pass the nurse aide competency evaluation examination within 120 calendar days of the start of their part-time employment as a nurse aide. It would also allow DHS to seek the necessary federal approval required to implement SB 671 if enacted.

Currently, a student can only be employed as a nurse aide while in a nurse aide training program if the student is a full-time permanent employee. Allowing students to work part-time while in a training program would provide the flexibility these workers need to earn their credentials. The bill would support a career pathway for entry-level caregivers, helping them to remain in health care while advancing their careers. The bill would also help providers meet their current need for nurse aides.

Wisconsin needs more health care workers, particularly entry-level caregivers. The number of certified nurse aides (CNAs) has significantly decreased since the onset of the pandemic, dropping by 16 percent in the last four years (from 61,400 in January 2018 to 51,400 in September 2023).¹ Wisconsin needs 10,000 more registered CNAs to reach 2018 levels. This problem is expected to worsen as Wisconsin's population ages. The number of Wisconsinites over age 65 is expected to grow from 1.1 million in 2020 to 1.5 million in 2035.² Caregivers are forced to work overtime to cover unfilled shifts, take on new responsibilities without adequate support or training, and put their own health at risk, while still caring for their own families.

Governor Evers and DHS have invested in innovative solutions to strengthen the healthcare workforce. For example, WisCaregiver Careers funds training and retention bonuses for CNAs in

¹ Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "Nurse Aide Program: Registry Statistics," last revised October 6, 2023, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/caregiver/nurse-aide/statistics.htm>.

² Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "Aging: Demographics in Wisconsin," last revised January 11, 2023, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aging/demographics.htm>.

skilled nursing facilities. The program is supported through a \$5.9 million CDC grant, which will expire in early 2024. 2023 Act 19 provided one-time funding of \$2 million GPR to continue the program through state fiscal year 2025 and expanded eligibility to all health and residential care providers. WisCaregiver Careers is cited nationally as a best practice. At least three other states (Idaho, New Hampshire, and North Carolina) have launched programs modeled after it. The National Governors Association recommends that states implement similar programs to “encourage entry into the direct care workforce and identify and support pathways that will remove barriers and facilitate transition to higher skilled jobs with better wages.”³ The program is much needed. Long-term care facilities recently reported a 28.4 percent vacancy rate for nurse aides.⁴ According to the Wisconsin Hospital Association, CNAs have the highest vacancy rates among hospital professionals. To address this issue, WHA recommends that the state “create and make clear educational and occupational pathways to attract new entrants.”⁵

SB 671 would provide new flexibilities while expanding the current workforce for critically needed CNAs and bolstering health care services for all Wisconsinites. DHS thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 671 and offers itself as a resource for the Committee.

³ National Governors Association, “State Strategies for Sector Growth and Retention of the Direct Care Health Workforce,” September 2021, [NGA_SectorGrowth-DirectCare_report.pdf](https://www.nga.org/files-publications/2021-09-21-NGA-SectorGrowth-DirectCare-report.pdf).

⁴ LeadingAge Wisconsin, “The Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis,” 2022, <https://www.leadingagewi.org/media/113792/2022-workforce-report-7-13a.pdf>.

⁵ Wisconsin Hospital Association, “Health Care Workforce Report,” 2022, https://www.wha.org/MediaRoom/DataandPublications/WHAReports/Workforce/2022/Report/WHA-Workforce-Report-2022_web.