



## PATRICK TESTIN

### STATE SENATOR

DATE: December 7, 2023

RE: **Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 706**

TO: Senate Committee on Health

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

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Thank you to Chairwoman Cabral-Guevara and Committee Members for hearing this bill.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 46 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.

SB 706 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 SB 706 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 SB 706.



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# TONY KURTZ

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony before Senate Committee on Health  
Rep. Tony Kurtz  
Senate Bill 706**

Good morning, Chairwoman Cabral-Guevara and Members of the Senate Committee on Health. Thank you for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 706 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.

SB-706 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.

SB-706 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.

SB-706 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 respectfully request your support of Senate Bill 706 and thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. Please feel free to reach out to my office if you have any questions.

# Memo

TO Chair Cabral-Guevara and Members of the Senate Committee on Health

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FROM Doug Ballweg, President & CEO, Delta Dental of Wisconsin

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DATE December 7, 2023

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RE Support of Senate Bills 689 (Licensure of Dental Therapists), 692 (Dentist/Dental Hygienist Compact), and 706 (Marquette Dentistry Scholarships)

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Thank you, Chairwoman Cabral-Guebara, and members of the Senate Committee on Health, for taking time to consider these important bills on oral health access. Delta Dental believes that together the bills are helpful building blocks that will continue moving Wisconsin forward toward better access to oral health care, especially in our rural areas.

Delta Dental continues to work as a partner with the State of Wisconsin in providing support to both dental patients and professionals in an effort to improve oral health care for all Wisconsinites. Through a partnership with Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Delta Dental of Wisconsin and the Delta Dental of Wisconsin Foundation have contributed more than \$5 million to the Seal-a-Smile program. Each year the program provides oral health screenings, fluoride varnish, and sealants when necessary to elementary students across Wisconsin, at no cost to participants. Typically, 70,000 students participate with nearly half receiving dental sealants.

Delta Dental also realizes the importance of supporting providers who choose to work in underserved areas. Delta Dental currently does this through a fellowship program where our Foundation provides funding for up to three recent Marquette University School of Dentistry graduates to participate in an advanced general dentistry training program that focuses on the needs of low-income patients in rural areas. To complement this fellowship program, the Delta Dental Foundation established a Service Loan Repayment Program, which provides financial assistance of up to \$100,000 in loan repayments for dentists who commit to providing dental care in designated underserved geographical areas. We believe SB 706, which would fund scholarships for Marquette dental students who commit to practicing in these same areas, is highly complementary to these efforts and we urge passage.

# Memo

Delta Dental has long been a proponent of licensing dental therapists in Wisconsin, and we laud the work Senator Felzkowski and others have done to move the policy this far. Our message on dental therapy has been consistent in that it is one necessary piece to a broader set of reforms. It can help reduce costs, provide greater access to care by allowing for another pathway toward becoming a dental professional in Wisconsin and it can also facilitate the expansion of dentist supervised services into additional settings, such as nursing homes, veteran facilities, schools, hospitals, mobile clinics, and satellite dental clinics. Community clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers are too valuable an asset to the citizens of Wisconsin to continue to put them at risk. Long-term solutions like employing dental therapists are needed to address the workforce and reimbursement issues they face. We urge passage of SB 689.

Access to dental care is a serious issue for the state's underinsured or uninsured, but it is also becoming an issue for those with insurance in places where access to dental professionals is limited. Ratification of the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact is another way to expand our pool of oral health professionals able to work in Wisconsin. Encouraging a system that allows for portability of licenses from other states while still maintaining Wisconsin's high standards is a small but important step we can take to increase access.

Thank you again for your attention to this important matter. We encourage the Senate Committee on Health to support SB 689, SB 692, and SB 706.

Sincerely,



Doug Ballweg  
President/CEO  
Delta Dental of Wisconsin