

**AB 770: Critical Access Hospitals Assessment
Testimony by State Representative Joan Ballweg
Assembly Committee on Rural Economic Development
March 2, 2010**

Thank you Chair Garthwaite and members for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 770.

There are folks here that can explain the technical side of the bill, Eric Borgerding from the Wisconsin Hospital Association and Tim Size of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative.

I would like to talk about my personal relationship with rural Critical Access Hospitals (CAH), and how they have been part of my life. Twenty-eight years ago my oldest child was born in a CAH, by an emergency C-section. Luckily the births of my two daughters were much less eventful, but knowing access is available in our communities for those critical life events is a crucial aspect of successful patient care.

The birth of my son, was only the beginning of my relationship with CAH's, in 1998 we moved our business from Markesan to Waupun, and shortly after the relocation, I was asked to interview for the Waupun Memorial Hospital Board of Directors. I served on the board for six years, including two years as president, and it was during my tenure that Waupun Memorial researched and then applied successfully to become a Critical Access Hospital.

As Board President I saw the opportunity of the Critical Access funding model as a means to provide cost effective reliable health care service to the people of western Fond du Lac and southern Green Lake counties. In setting rates for the hospital on an annual

basis, we could keep our charges down because being paid cost on MA services is the right thing for all the patients of the community, including the private payers.

This newly proposed system is not the preferred means, CAH were promised when assessment started they would be protected. But, times and budgets change and this is a good compromise to keep good rural health call accessible in time of crisis.

My district includes three Critical Access Hospitals, and as I explained a fourth just outside the district in Waupun. Wild Rose Community Memorial, the first CAH in Wisconsin, serves Waushara County, and it is the only one in the county. Berlin Memorial Hospital opened in 1911, and has been serving Green Lake County. It also serves north-eastern Marquette County, which has no resident hospital. The third, Ripon Memorial Hospital was started in the 1920's. The building the hospital occupies is actually owned by the City of Ripon. Local communities see the value in these CAH's and consider them necessary to serve the people of their region.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue for all of rural Wisconsin.