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**TO: Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform**

**FROM: Ann Zenk, SVP Workforce & Clinical Practice  
Jon Hoelter, VP Federal & State Relations**

**DATE: March 16, 2022**

**RE: WHA Written Testimony on Opportunities to Improve Health Care Licensure and Credentialing**

Thank you for holding an informational hearing on the topic of processing occupational licenses at the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS). The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) has been pleased to work with the Department in addressing this aspect of our workforce challenges and welcomes additional collaboration with the State Legislature and the Department to address problems that persist.

WHA has focused for years on working with policymakers and our members to help grow Wisconsin's health care workforce. In fact, WHA's 18<sup>th</sup> annual workforce report is being released today. Each year, this report has alerted policymakers and the public to the impending workforce shortages Wisconsin faces as our state's population continues to age, providing lawmakers with data and information to develop sound public policy.

Today, nearly all industries are feeling the effects of a shrinking workforce, but health care is additionally challenged because the demographic leaving our workforce due to retirements is, at the same time, creating more demand for health care services. We have seen retirements accelerate during the pandemic, reinforcing the need to do all we can to stave off a severe health care workforce shortage. New entrants to the workforce cannot keep up with the disproportionate retirements of the large Baby Boom generation.

Since 2013, the Wisconsin State Legislature has funded a "Grow Our Own" grant program that matches state funding with hospital investments to provide new residency training opportunities for physicians. This was followed with a similar program for Advanced Practice Clinicians and Allied Health professionals. By 2023, these grants will have created 136 new physician residency training positions along with nearly 40 more advanced practice and allied health professional clinical training opportunities. WHA has been proud to partner with the Legislature and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services on this successful initiative.

WHA has also been working for years to cut through red tape that hampers the ability of new health care professionals to practice in Wisconsin. WHA was a lead advocate for legislation allowing Wisconsin to join both the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact and the enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact, making it easier for health care professionals in good standing from other states to obtain licensure in Wisconsin. Yet despite these accomplishments, we still face challenges getting new health care professionals licensed to practice.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Governor and DSPS leadership worked closely with WHA to develop a streamlined licensure process for out-of-state providers who were credentialed in good standing in other states but had yet to receive a Wisconsin license. The process put forward by DSPS, in close consultation with WHA and others, was the model ultimately used to develop legislation to make this policy permanent, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021 Wisconsin Act 10.

Prioritizing health care licensure, along with Act 10 and the licensure compacts, are all critical tools that helped Wisconsin's hospitals replenish our workforce as hospitals faced a COVID-19 spike this past fall and winter. When Wisconsin's fall 2020 surge came earlier than most other states, Wisconsin hospitals were able to benefit from the nearly seamless ability for providers and nursing staff to temporarily relocate to Wisconsin to practice.

Another piece of legislation, signed into law by Governor Evers last week as 2021 Wisconsin Act 158, creates an expedited pathway for returning military medics, corpsmen and medical technicians to begin using their medical skills in the civilian world while they complete the training and education requirements for state licensure in associated health care professions.

Despite these proactive policies and constant collaboration with DSPS, we continue to hear from WHA members that some applicants for licensure continue to face long wait times. These delays are typically, but not always, from individuals who are not eligible for a streamlined pathway like an interstate compact or the 2021 Wisconsin Act 10 process.

WHA has been working with DSPS to ease licensing backlogs since the summer of 2021. We have built a very positive relationship with the Department and appreciate their efforts to help move delayed licenses through the process. This partnership has allowed us to help prioritize delayed applications and get health care professionals' applications "unstuck" in the process so they can begin practicing in Wisconsin, but we also recognize that this cannot be the permanent solution for either the Department, the applicants nor their employers – our members.

Learning from the gains we've made with 2021 Act 10, licensure compacts, and new legislation creating pathways for members of the armed services, we are hopeful DSPS, the Legislature, and other stakeholders can agree on new ways to streamline licensure. One idea the legislature considered this session would have granted a form of probationary license for Wisconsinites who newly complete their training and pass their exams. Much like 2021 Act 10, it would allow applicants to utilize their education and training and join the health care workforce while their license makes its way through the process at DSPS.

If committee members have any additional comments or questions following this hearing, please contact WHA's Vice President Federal and State Relations Jon Hoelter at [jhoelter@wha.org](mailto:jhoelter@wha.org) or (608) 274-1820.