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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: May 24, 2023**

**RE: WHA Testimony in Support of AB 204 & AB 205: Lengthening Renewal Dates and Making it Easier for Qualified Professionals from Other States to Practice in Wisconsin**

Chair Sortwell and members of the Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform, thank you for holding a hearing on AB 204, relating to renewal dates and continuing education requirements for certain credentials issued by the Department of Safety and Professional Services and AB 205, relating to: practice of certain professions by credential holders from other states. The Wisconsin Hospital Association represents more than 135 hospitals and integrated health systems across the state, from small, rural, Critical Access Hospitals to large, urban academic medical centers, and everything in between.

While our members may differ greatly in the size of the community they serve, one consistent challenge they all face is how to meet the ever-increasing demand for health care services in an environment where every sector is experiencing a workforce shortage. As a member of the Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licenses, and on behalf of our WHA members, I've had the opportunity to testify before your committee on the great need to streamline licensure processes for a hospital and health care workforce almost 110,000 individuals strong. About 70 percent of the hospital workforce relies on Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) licensure in order to work in Wisconsin, and delays in licensure and renewal create barriers to serving in the health care workforce.

While staffing at hospitals continues to rise, it is not keeping pace with demand as approximately 10,000 positions remain vacant in Wisconsin hospitals across the state. In fact, vacancy rates have increased for all 17 health care positions that we track – and nearly doubled overall from 5.3% in 2020 to 9.9% in 2021.

Even worse, demographics are working against health care, as the highest utilizers of health care are those aged 65 and older who are also retiring from the healthcare workforce. It will be seven years from now when the last baby boomers turn 65, meaning that we have yet to experience the full impact of the baby boom generation on the demand for health care and, thus, our health care workforce. Filling needed health care positions with a shrinking workforce makes attracting workers from other states a key strategy for Wisconsin. Wisconsin's very low unemployment rate compared to neighboring states makes this an even more important strategy.

The Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) has made efforts to alleviate these challenges under the Evers Administration, partly by implementing a new, and long overdue, electronic licensure system. Despite this forward-thinking measure, licensure and renewal backlogs remain – backlogs that could be greatly reduced by implementing commonsense reforms.

WHA was pleased to see the Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational License unanimously recommend one such reform, AB 204, for introduction. This legislation will safely extend renewal timeframes from 2 to 4 years to ease the renewal burden on providers while also giving DSPS the flexibility to determine when renewals will occur and better

load-level the work of the department. DSPS will be able to look at the number of renewals and the complexity of the profession's renewal process, and divide the work to break down current bottlenecks.

Similarly, the study committee also unanimously supported AB 205. This legislation builds on the bipartisan 2021 Act 10, which allowed health care practitioners licensed and in good standing from another state to begin practicing immediately while DSPS processes their full licensure application. We have seen first-hand in the health care industry how this legislation has been effectively implemented by DSPS and provides an advantage for Wisconsin that other states do not have. Whereas Wisconsin was previously losing out on qualified health care providers from other states due to competing states licensing them in a timelier fashion, we are now a model for other states to emulate. WHA supports the provisions in Assembly Bill 205 that correct the unintended exclusion of radiographers and other health care professions licensed by DSPS from 2021 Act 10.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on these two bills. WHA enthusiastically supports these proposals that build on the positive, bipartisan reforms Governor Evers and the Legislature have already begun and help sustain and expand the workforce hospitals and health systems need to meet growing demand for care.