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DHS Deputy Secretary Standridge Applauds WHA, Presents Governor's Proclamation to Borgerding

Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Deputy Secretary Deb Standridge gave a rousing lunch address to WHA Advocacy Day attendees, highlighting the importance of preserving and improving Wisconsin's excellent health care system.



Deb Standridge presents Eric Borgerding a proclamation recognizing his many contributions to WHA and health care from Gov. Tony Evers.

Standridge began by presenting Borgerding with a proclamation from Gov. Tony Evers recognizing his many contributions to WHA and to improving the lives and overall well-being of countless Wisconsinites and wishing him the best for his upcoming retirement.

She also detailed the challenge DHS has faced in recent weeks after the federal government announced it would be cutting positions at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services which could lead to the termination of numerous federal contracts WI DHS receives and administers, totaling over \$225 million. The Evers Administration

has sued to block the terminations and a federal judge has granted a temporary restraining order for the time being, but there remains a high level of uncertainty over the eventual outcome according to Standridge.

On a more positive note, Standridge highlighted the work the Evers Administration has done to show the importance of health care workers, including creating a health care workforce task force that includes representatives from six Wisconsin health systems. She also thanked WHA for its outstanding 2025 Health Care Workforce Report, noting that its priorities aligned with many priorities of the task force. She also extolled Gov. Tony Evers' support for increasing funding for WHA's "Grow Our Own" program in his state budget, which included an additional \$5 million for grants to support health care provider training.

In addition to this, the Deputy Secretary also highlighted Gov. Evers' prioritization of improving Medicaid reimbursement in his state budget, another shared priority of WHA.

"We know that rural health care and rural hospitals are especially challenged today with keeping a financially viable bottom line. We know all of you are experiencing a shift to governmental pay as opposed to commercial pay," said Standridge. "The governor's proposed Medicaid reimbursement increase will support access to high quality patient care for Medicaid members and help ensure hospitals remain financially stable," she added.



Deb Standridge

Last but not least, Standridge highlighted Governor Evers' budget proposal aimed at holding health insurers accountable.

"I remember my years in hospitals. I remember hearing the footsteps of a surgeon coming down the hallway saying, 'Standridge—the blankety blank, blank blank was denied again, and the patient's surgery is in two days! What are you going to do about this? You better fix it!'" said Standridge. She said that's why Gov. Evers is proposing to make Wisconsin the first state in the nation to audit health insurers over their claim denials and make sweeping changes to streamline the prior authorization process - making it less burdensome on health care providers and less stressful for patients.

Standridge ended by encouraging WHA's Advocacy Day attendees.

"You cannot rely on a healthy, vibrant community without financially stable hospitals. Communicating that message today is critical and it must be framed as a shared issue. You and your teams are resilient, you're adaptive, you're agile, and you are committed...let our legislators know who you are, what is important to you, your organization and community and tell them why," she said.