

The Pew Charitable Trusts: Dozens of bipartisan groups, experts urge passage of critical health legislation in moving Wisconsin Senate Health Committee Testimony

Posted on Wednesday, Aug 21, 2019

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Contacts:

Elisabeth Portz (Rep. Felzkowski), 608.266.7694,
Elisabeth.Portz@legis.wisconsin.gov

Nye Harte (Pew) 202.540.6704, nharte@pewtrusts.org

Josh Rosenblum (Pew), 720.220.7483, jrosenblum@pewtrusts.org

New Profession of Dental Therapist Would Help Wisconsin Kids, Veterans, Older Americans

Madison, WI— Today at a Wisconsin state Senate Health Committee hearing experts, and consumers urged support of dental therapy legislation by Wisconsin State Senator David Craig (R-Town of Vernon) and Rep. Mary Felzkowski (R-Irma). The legislation backed by dozens of state, local and national groups, would help stop the oral health crisis in Wisconsin by allowing for the position of dental therapist, a provider similar to a physician assistant in medicine that works under the supervision of a dentist would help underserved populations including children, veterans, and older Americans in Wisconsin.

A staggering 64 of 72 Wisconsin counties face dental care shortages, affecting 1.2

million residents. And, in Wisconsin more than 41,000 emergency room visits for preventable dental conditions were reported by hospitals in the most recently available annual data, representing nearly \$25 million in hospital charges.

Rep. Mary Felzkowski said in her testimony “I have a former employee who has to drive two and half to three hours just to get dental care in Wisconsin...This affects every single family in the state of Wisconsin. When you have a 9 year old girl with 13 cavities in her mouth, her quality of life is not good.”

Sen. Craig said in his testimony “The concept of dental therapists are nonpartisan and embraced by both conservatives and liberals. The dental access problem in Wisconsin directly impacts children, rural and elderly populations.”

Ann Lynch, Director of Advocacy & Education for the American Dental Hygienists' Association said “When I meet dentists in Minnesota who initially opposed the legislation, they tell me they want to hire one or more dental therapists.”

In part of his questions to the Wisconsin Dental Association Sen. Senator Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield), a cosponsor of the bill and member of the committee said “I see the opportunity for a smart dentist to hire and expand my practice to create more patients, more revenue, and more opportunity. A kid should not sit in a classroom with dental pain.”

The committee is expected to vote on dental therapy legislation in an upcoming meeting.