

Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association: Community Health Center advocates encourage support for veterans and healthcare workforce legislation

Posted on Tuesday, Dec 14, 2021

>> 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.](#)

Madison, WI – At today's Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs hearing, veteran and health care workforce advocates offered testimony in support of Senate Bill 688 (SB 688). The bipartisan bill and its companion, Assembly Bill 720 (AB 720), championed by Senator Jacque and Representative Summerfield, aim to create a common-sense solution to enhance workforce pathways for veterans in Wisconsin's health care field. The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association applauds the innovative approach to health care workforce recruitment and retention, which also recognizes and honors the service of veterans.

Today, veterans returning to civilian life do not have a pathway to seamlessly apply their military health care skills in civilian clinical practice settings, which may result in veterans leaving the health care field altogether, or delays in providing much-needed patient care. SB 688 would create a state program to allow military medics and corpsmen with valuable health care experience to provide care at local Wisconsin Community Health Centers, along with hospitals and other facilities, while they pursue permanent licensure. Veterans would practice under the supervision of a qualified clinical professional, such as a physician, translating their experience serving in the armed forces for civilian populations. This legislation is modeled after successful programs already implemented in Virginia and Veterans Affairs facilities.

At a time when our state's health care workforce is already stretched responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to use every tool available to maintain qualified professionals in the health care field. Availability of a pathway for permanent practice, referred to as the Wis-Mac program, would also be a powerful recruitment tool for clinics across the state.

"This legislation enables a creative, yet proven and sustainable framework to attract qualified veterans with health care skills and training to continue their mission and service in the state of Wisconsin. These veterans have skills, training and commitment to service. The need for health care personnel is critical, directly affecting patient outcomes and access to care. SB 688 is an important piece in solving the workforce shortage puzzle in health care," advocated Sylvia Lai, Recruiting and Onboarding Specialist, Bridge Community Health Clinic. Bridge is a Community Health Center which provides medical, dental, behavioral health, and other primary care services in the Wausau area.

SB 688 was introduced on Veteran's Day, November 11, 2021, with strong bipartisan support from 28 state lawmakers. WPHCA appreciates advocates and policymakers for their collaboration in developing the Wis-Mac legislation, and urges all state lawmakers to consider co-sponsoring SB 688 and AB 720.

The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) represents all 17 of Wisconsin's Federally Qualified Health Centers which provided care for nearly 300,000 Wisconsin residents in 2020.