

Sen. Carpenter: Don't reinvent the wheel, let DSPS hire staff

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(MADISON)— Senator Tim Carpenter (D-Milwaukee) issued the following comments after the first meeting of the 2022 Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licensure:

“When I learned that Sen. Rob Stafsholt would chair the 2022 Study Committee on Occupational Licenses, I assumed it was because he was up to date on the issues affecting the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), the agency that processes applications for professional and occupational licenses.

“During the first meeting of the study committee, to my surprise, Sen. Stafsholt admitted he was unaware but potentially supportive of DSPS’s requests for more staff. With more staff, DSPS says it can license qualified professionals more quickly and send Wisconsinites to work in our crucial industries.

“Sen. Stafsholt must not have been paying attention when I spoke on the Senate floor in January about the agency’s budget requests for more staff. I was explaining that there are only about 50 employees responsible for processing applications for 240 different professions. I also explained that DSPS’s request was denied by the Joint Finance Committee and that I was offering my amendment as another attempt to give DSPS the authority to hire the staff it requires to serve our constituents. Sen. Stafsholt must have forgotten that during that floor session he and his Republican colleagues voted against my amendment that would provide those extra staff.

“The constituents who contact our offices are paying for good and efficient service from DSPS. Unfortunately, the money they pay in licensure fees cannot all be used to pay staff to answer questions or process their applications. The legislature has authorized the agency to spend only a portion of what it earns in fees to hire staff,

process thousands of applications per year, and answer thousands of phone calls per week. DSPS leaders and applicants tell us the current authorized staffing level is not nearly enough.

“According to the legislative fiscal bureau, as of July 1, 2022, the health and business licensing program at DSPS has \$35 million that it cannot use without approval from the legislature. The legislature could allow DSPS to reinvest the \$35 million to hire staff and improve programs, but Republicans refuse to let them do so. Applicants are confused and irritated to hear that the money they pay is left to do nothing while they wait for their applications to be reviewed by a short staffed department. Any discussion of licensure must be attentive to this issue, and it is clear now that the legislature should increase spending authority and position authority to provide DSPS the tools it needs to succeed.

“I hope the study committee can make progress eliminating the unnecessary restrictions on DSPS that prevent it from doing its best for license applicants. Solutions cannot consist solely of relaxing requirements, eliminating credentials, and rubberstamping applications. The main solution is to allow DSPS to use its budget to do its job.”