

U.S. Rep. Gallagher: Delegation demand answers from Evers' on long-term National Guard use in WI nursing homes

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GREEN BAY, WI — Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) led the Wisconsin Republican House Delegation in sending a letter to Governor Tony Evers with questions and concerns regarding the use of the Wisconsin National Guard as semi-permanent healthcare staff amidst the workforce shortage. The letter follows Governor Evers' February 8 request to President Biden to extend full federal funding for the National Guard until the end of September.

In part, the lawmakers wrote, "We have no doubt that the Wisconsin National Guard is an incredibly versatile force that can serve some of Wisconsin's most vulnerable populations well. But your recent letter to President Biden suggests that you are planning to use a federally-funded National Guard as a solution to a long-term workforce challenge. We have concerns with the sustainability of this approach especially considering the nearly two-year deployment of the Guard in response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

View the letter [HERE](#) or read the text below:

Governor Evers,

Since the start of the pandemic, we have been impressed by the flexibility and persistence of Wisconsin's National Guardsmen. At the start of the pandemic, they provided invaluable services to their fellow Wisconsinites during a time of incredible uncertainty. But now, almost two years into the pandemic, we are concerned that Wisconsin's Guardsmen are being used as a long-term solution to workforce challenges that will outlast the current surge in hospitalizations. We ask that you provide us with information on how your administration plans to address these workforce shortages through more sustainable means.

In your February 8, 2022 letter to President Biden, you asked for nearly an 8-month extension of full federal funding for the National Guard to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Wisconsin. You identified the training of Guardsmen to serve in long-term care facilities as a new mission that will be supported by this funding. We recognize that additional Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) will free up hospital bed space by moving patients more quickly into long-term care facilities. However, this new mission is unlike any of the previous roles the National Guard has taken on during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the Guard mainly helped support the distribution of personal protective equipment and conduct community testing.^[1] In 2021, the Guard's main role in COVID response was testing and vaccine distribution.^[2] These vital activities were always meant to support short-term needs as we got through waves of the pandemic.

Now that officials and experts are finally admitting that COVID-19 will be endemic it is time for our leaders to think creatively about how to unwind emergency stopgaps and return to normal. Unlike testing or the distribution of PPE and vaccines, long-term care facility staff shortages have causes other than just the COVID-19 pandemic. So, we ask that you respond to the following questions:

1. How have the federal and state COVID relief dollars you distributed to long-term care facilities been used to address staffing shortages? What plans have you developed to increase the staffing of long-term care facilities without using the Wisconsin National Guard?
2. How has turning to the Wisconsin National Guard impacted the development of solutions to the more systemic workforce challenges facing the long-term care industry?
3. You have asked for an extension of full federal funding for the Wisconsin National Guard until September 30, 2022. Do you expect to use the Guard as CNAs until that time? If not, how long do you plan to use the Guard to supplement staffing at long-term care facilities?
4. What units have you activated and what units are you planning to activate? What are their Primary Military Occupational Specialty?
5. What impact has the two-year COVID response mission had on the training and equipment readiness standards of the Wisconsin National Guard?

We have no doubt that the Wisconsin National Guard is an incredibly versatile force that can serve some of Wisconsin's most vulnerable populations well. But your recent letter to President Biden suggests that you are planning to use a federally-funded National Guard as a solution to a long-term workforce challenge. We have concerns with the sustainability of this approach especially considering the nearly

two-year deployment of the Guard in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your responses.

[1] Wisconsin National Guard, “Year-in-Review: 2020 A Year Unlike Any Other in Wisconsin Guard History.” News release, December 30, 2020. <https://ng.wi.gov/news/20271>

[2] Wisconsin National Guard, “Wisconsin National Guard Continues to Fulfill State’s Needs in COVID-19 Pandemic Response.” News release, December 20, 2021. <https://ng.wi.gov/news/21126>