

Assembly passes bill allowing mental health care specialists licensed in other states to practice telehealth without Wisconsin license

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The Assembly today approved by voice vote a bill aiming to ensure out-of-state mental health care providers with licenses in other states don't have to be licensed in Wisconsin to offer telehealth services in the state.

AB 541, which now heads to the Senate, was amended to require those who offer telehealth mental health services in the state to submit a form to the Department of Safety and Professional Services within 30 days to confirm they have a license to offer telehealth services.

Rep. Supreme Moore Omokunde said while “the concept is great,” he wouldn't support the bill.

“I don't know that this bill actually does what needs to happen and provides certain protections,” the Milwaukee Dem added.

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Bill co-author Rep. Nate Gustafson argued “we ultimately cannot let perfect get in the way of great.”

“I think it is a step in the right direction,” the Neenah Republican said of the proposal. “We can't stall any longer.”

The chamber approved several other health care-related bills, including SB 419, which would allow hearing instrument specialists, who help fit and deal in hearing

aids, to perform cerumen, also known as earwax, removal upon completion of a special course. Current law allows audiologists, but not hearing instrument specialists, to perform earwax management.

The measure passed by voice vote and is headed to the gov's desk.

Rep. Lisa Subeck said she didn't support the bill due to "significant concerns" from audiologists in her district.

"What seems like it should be no big deal is actually a process that can cause significant damage to people's ears can permanently affect hearing if done wrong, and I just after hearing their concerns, I'm not convinced that this bill is in the best interest of patients," the Madison Dem said.

Bill co-author Rep. Donna Rozar argued the bill is about affordability and accessibility, noting there can be inconveniences for people getting fitted for hearing aids who need earwax removed.

"Especially in the rural communities, there are a lot of options to send patients when they go to hearing instrument specialists," the Marshfield Republican said. "And sometimes these patients have to travel a greater distance just to have somebody remove cerumen from the ear canal."