

WISCONSIN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION, INC.



Date: October 17, 2017

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

From: Ann Zenk, RN, MHA – Vice President Workforce & Clinical Practice

Re: WHA Support of SB 417 – Adopting the enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact in WI

Thank you Chairperson Vukmir and Senate Health Committee members for hearing Senate Bill 417, legislation enacting the enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact in Wisconsin. This legislation will maintain Wisconsin's place in a nursing compact that reduces regulatory burden on nurses, state agencies, and health care organizations, and continues the licensure portability that has benefited patients, nurses and our state's healthcare organizations for two decades.

Wisconsin was an inaugural member of the first nurse licensure compact, implemented in January 2000. Simply put, a nurse licensure compact allows a nurse holding a multi-state license from a compact state to work in any of the other compact states. Sustaining membership in a nurse licensure compact by joining the enhanced compact will benefit high quality health care by making it easier for patients to access care by Wisconsin nurses and removing regulatory barriers for nurses successfully recruited to work in Wisconsin's high quality health care facilities.

High quality health care attracts high quality professionals, and Wisconsin healthcare is ranked at or near the top by many national measures. Most recently, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) ranked Wisconsin first among all states in health care quality. Wisconsin's rural hospitals received recognition as the highest performing hospitals in Medicare's quality improvement program.

This high quality health care does not come by chance, it is the result of dedicated hospital leaders, physicians, nurses and other staff members who provide care to patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. This high quality health care is also the result of good public policy enacted by Wisconsin lawmakers which protects our members' ability to deliver high quality, high value health care and ensure that our health care workforce can meet patient needs today and into the future.

The enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact continues to allow high quality nurses from other states who wish to work in Wisconsin's top-performing health care organizations without obtaining multiple licenses. Our experience since 2000 shows that this interstate agreement is important to all of our states hospitals, including those that are on the state's border along with rural and urban hospitals in non-border communities looking to fill staff vacancies and deploy innovative care delivery models.

High quality health care is provided by professionals and organizations who understand how to manage workforce and ensure access to care in Wisconsin. Nurses and health care organizations across the state support adoption of the enhanced compact, including the Wisconsin Hospital Association, the Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives and the Wisconsin Nurses Association. Strategies, like telemedicine, that make Wisconsin's high quality health care more accessible to patients in Wisconsin, and can spread that health care to other states, are implemented more easily with

a Wisconsin nurse who holds a multi-state license. Wisconsin's nursing leaders also know that managing a stable workforce sometimes means responding to higher than expected demand. This includes the use of traveling nurses with compact licenses as a more ready source in an unanticipated, and temporary, workforce shortage.

Licensure compacts can also help Wisconsin receive and lend support from and to other states when disaster relief is needed. As a compact state, Texas is grateful for the many compact state nurses who are able to quickly provide essential hurricane disaster relief with no additional licensure action by the Texas Board of Nursing. In the two weeks immediately after Hurricane Harvey hit, Texas had to issue over 600 emergency licenses to non-compact state nurses, an unnecessary regulatory burden during an unprecedented disaster which could have been avoided by compact membership in those states.

High quality health care attracts patients to our state. In fact, WHA's 2015 Health Hospitals, Healthy Communities report found that the economic impact of non-Wisconsin residents coming to Wisconsin to receive their health care is \$3 billion per year. Wisconsin "snowbirds" who move seasonally to other states, but save their health care for Wisconsin, can benefit from providers maintaining their license in multiple states. Wisconsin nurses holding a multi-state license can provide follow-up phone calls and virtual care to patients in states like Florida, Texas, and Arizona, without jumping through additional hoops, or holding single-state licenses in those states, maintaining a smooth patient/provider relationship within Wisconsin's health care system.

Finally, high quality health care relies on safe and reliable practice. Nurses caring for patients in Wisconsin are bound by Wisconsin rules, regardless of which compact state issued their license. Sustaining Wisconsin's participation in a nurse licensure compact is important to Wisconsin nurses, health care organizations, and Wisconsin's citizens.

On behalf of WHA and our member organizations, we would like to thank Senator Marklein, Representative VanderMeer, and others for authoring the bill. The bill maintains Wisconsin's status as a compact state and protects the benefits provided to nurses and patients through this interstate agreement.