

WHA Supported Workforce, Behavioral Health Priorities Pass Senate

On Jan. 16, the Wisconsin State Senate approved WHA priorities that will enhance the state graduate medical education (GME) grant program and require the Wisconsin Medicaid program to pursue a waiver of the federal institutions for mental disease (IMD) exclusion.

[Senate Bill 643](#), introduced by Sens. Romaine Quinn (R-Cameron) and Cory Tomczyk (R-Weston) along with Reps. Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville) and Pat Snyder (R-Wausau), lifts the three-slot (i.e., \$225,000 state funding) cap for hospitals applying for expansion grants to allow hospitals to apply for more slots if they are willing and able to expand further. The bill also allows for up to \$375,000 per year to be used for GME training consortia programs that overcome the unique challenges faced by rural hospitals in starting and sustaining GME programs. Finally, the bill clarifies the sustaining nature of state grant funding to hospitals that have previously received an award, as long as they continue to qualify for the program.

In December 2023, WHA's Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk [testified in favor of Senate Bill 643](#) in Committee along with representatives from the Wisconsin Northern & Central Consortium for Graduate Medical Education, the Wisconsin Council for Rural GME and physician residency leaders from SSM Health – Monroe.

The legislation passed the Senate on a 31-1 vote and has now been sent to the Assembly for concurrence before the legislation heads to Governor Tony Evers' desk. The Assembly Health, Aging & Long-Term Care Committee voted unanimously to approve the Assembly companion to SB 643.

[Assembly Bill 616](#), introduced by Reps. Karen Hurd (R-Fall Creek) and Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam) along with Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and Jesse James (R-Altoona), directs the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to pursue a waiver of a 1960s-era federal prohibition on state Medicaid programs reimbursing for services provided in standalone psychiatric facilities with more than 16 inpatient beds, known as IMDs. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has encouraged state Medicaid programs to pursue IMD waivers, which Wisconsin successfully did for substance use services in 2017. Assembly Bill 616, a behavioral health priority for WHA, would direct DHS to pursue a waiver for all behavioral health services provided in an IMD, not just substance use.

WHA's General Counsel Matthew Stanford was joined by the president of Aurora Psychiatric Hospital and Behavioral Health Operations Jessica Small in [testifying in support](#) of Assembly Bill 616 in November 2023. Alison Denil, Wisconsin market CEO for Summit Behavioral Health, also testified in support of Assembly Bill 616.

On Jan. 16, the Senate concurred in Assembly Bill 616, as passed by the Assembly, and the legislation now heads to Gov. Evers for his signature. DHS has expressed its support for the legislation, which some view as signaling support from Evers for the legislation.

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