



MIKE ROHRKASTE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 530

Testimony of State Representative Mike Rohrkaste
Assembly Committee on Workforce Development
December 15, 2015

Thank you, Chair Petryk, and members of the Committee on Workforce Development for holding this public hearing.

Assembly Bill 530 creates a Dietetic Internship Program in Wisconsin's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. The program creates a number of new dietetic internship slots each year, as determined by the Department of Health Services (DHS). These slots will be available to qualified individuals employed by the Wisconsin WIC program. Once they have completed the internship, participants will be required to remain employed by the WIC program for at least 24 months. According to DHS, the start-up cost of this program will be minimal and the program itself will be funded through the federal WIC program.

The goal of this legislation is to train Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) to enhance the quality of nutrition services delivered to Wisconsin WIC clients. This bill will also help to strengthen the state's healthcare workforce, as well as provide training opportunities for potential RDNs.

Currently, Wisconsin faces a significant shortage of dietetic internship opportunities for college graduates. Because of this shortage in internship opportunities, our state also faces a shortage in training opportunities for possible RDNs. These shortages will lead to diminished nutrition care services throughout our state and need to be addressed.

Assembly Bill 530 will also create good, family-supporting jobs here in Wisconsin. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual wage for dietitians in 2012 was about \$55,000 with employment of dietitians projected to grow 21 percent between 2012 and 2022. Passing this legislation will help people gain access to a well-paying profession and will strengthen Wisconsin's workforce opportunities.

I would like to thank the Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (WAND), as well as DHS for working with us on this legislation.

Let's pass AB 530 and support increased workforce opportunities, along with a strengthening of our health care profession and improved dietetic services here in Wisconsin.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Testimony on *Assembly Bill 530* before the
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
December 15, 2015

Julie Haase, MS, RDN, CD – *WAND member*

Good morning Chairperson Petryk and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of Assembly Bill 530.

My name is Julie Haase. I am a practicing Registered Dietitian and work as a Clinical Nutrition & Diabetes Manager for Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare. I am speaking today in both a personal capacity and as a representative of the Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

The Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics represents nearly 1,700 members statewide. Our membership is comprised of Registered Dietitians and Dietetic Technicians Registered. We are committed to providing expert food and nutrition services to the residents of Wisconsin. Our members work in a wide variety of health care settings, including hospitals, physician clinics, and nursing homes, as well as non-clinical settings, such as academia and research, food management and corporate wellness.

As was mentioned by those who testified earlier, Assembly Bill 530 would create a dietetic internship program within the state's Women, Infants and Children Program. The program would be administered by DHS and would be available statewide to non-credentialed nutritionists employed by the WIC program. The bill is modeled after successful programs that were established in a number of other states, including Texas, Georgia and Missouri.

Assembly Bill 530 will help strengthen the healthcare workforce in Wisconsin... provide greater career advancement and earning power for aspiring Registered Dietitians... and improve the quality of nutrition counseling provided to WIC recipients.

To become a Registered Dietitian, an individual must complete a minimum of a bachelor's degree with a focus on dietetic coursework, complete a dietetic internship program – which includes 1,200 hours of supervised practice – and pass a national examination.

The biggest hurdle most dietetics students face in their pursuit to becoming an RDN is being accepted in a dietetics internship program. The competition is fierce, and chances of getting into a program are only about 50%. In fact, in 2013, nearly 5,500 dietetics students from across the country applied for a dietetic internship – but only about 2,700 were ultimately accepted into a program. In Wisconsin, the numbers are even more troubling. Through the state’s existing five dietetic internship programs, only 56 slots are available on an annual basis. Last year, these programs received over 300 applications.

In short, the demand for dietetic internship slots has outstripped the supply. And the lack of available internship opportunities has directly led to a shortage of Registered Dietitians in Wisconsin and throughout the country. According to a 2012 workforce study by the Lewin Group, Wisconsin has only 33 RDs per 100,000 residents – well below anticipated demand. The study also pointed out that Wisconsin will face an RD shortfall of 25% of unmet demand by 2020. This is especially worrisome given the growing emphasis on prevention and wellness care and the important role nutrition plays in chronic disease management.

As you might imagine, the job outlook for Registered Dietitians is very strong. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of dietitians is projected to grow 21 percent from 2012 to 2022, which is faster than the average for all occupations. It’s also important to point out the median annual wage for RDs is around \$50,000, with many experienced RDs earning up to \$90,000. But without the creation of adequate dietetic internship slots, the pathway to these high-wage, family supporting jobs will be severely limited.

While AB 530 is not a silver bullet, it’s a strong step in the right direction, one that will begin to address the dietetic internship bottleneck that currently exists and ultimately strengthen the dietetic and nutrition care workforce in Wisconsin.

As you know, the bill creates a dietetic internship under the state’s WIC program. WAND supports this approach for two main reasons:

1. It allows the internship to be a statewide program, which has many benefits over a more traditional dietetic internship program. For example, a statewide program will provide access to a wider pool of clinical rotations and preceptors needed for interns to complete the program. It will also provide internship opportunities and help strengthen the RD workforce in rural parts of the state.
2. By placing the internship in the WIC program and requiring participants to continue to work for WIC for two years after completion of the internship, the bill will provide WIC recipients with greater access to RDs and quality nutrition counseling. This is particularly significant, as proper nutrition education has a positive impact on the health of women and children participating in the WIC program and can help reduce the prevalence of chronic disease in Wisconsin.

It's also important to point out that start-up and on-going costs for the program would be minimal and are intended under the bill to be funded with federal WIC dollars. We estimate the one-time start-up costs for the program would be about \$60,000 for accreditation and consulting expenses. The bill would also require a DHS employee to administer the program.

In regards to DHS, WAND has had an opportunity to meet with the agency on AB 530, and it's our understanding that agency may want to explore a few small adjustments to the bill. For example, the bill as currently drafted appears to incorrectly reference the use of state supplemental WIC funding. I want to assure the Committee that WAND looks forward to working with the bill's authors and DHS to fix that particular oversight and on any other items that could improve AB 530 as it moves through the legislative process.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' support for AB 530 and would also request the Committee's support for the legislation. I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and I would be more than happy to answer any questions.

AB 530 – Wisconsin WIC Dietetic Internship Program



Discussion Points:

- According to a 2012 workforce study by the Lewin Group, Wisconsin has 33.2 RDN per 100,000 residents, which is significantly below anticipated demand. The study estimates Wisconsin will face an RDN shortfall of 25% of unmet demand by 2020.
- Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) provided by RDNs leads to improved health outcomes, lower medical costs and reduced hospitalizations. The Lewin study documented a substantial reduction in hospital utilization and physician visits when MNT was provided to patients with chronic disease.
- According to the National WIC Association, for every dollar spent on a pregnant woman in WIC, up to \$4.21 is saved in Medicaid for her and her newborn baby.
- WIC significantly reduces the risk for preterm birth and low birth-weight babies. Additionally, Medicaid participants on WIC have on average 29% lower Medicaid costs for infant hospitalization compared with those not participating in WIC.

MAIN MESSAGE:

The state of Wisconsin is facing an anticipated shortage of Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDN), which will have a profound impact on access to nutrition services that help reduce the occurrence of chronic disease. The creation of the **Wisconsin WIC Dietetic Internship Program** would help strengthen the RDN workforce in Wisconsin and improve the quality of nutrition services delivered to WIC recipients in communities across the state.

BACKGROUND:

Across the country and in Wisconsin, dietetic internship opportunities for college graduates are scarce and competition for available slots is fierce. Unfortunately, insufficient training opportunities for potential RDNs has created an impending dietetic workforce shortage that will lead to diminished nutrition care services. According to a 2012 dietetics workforce study conducted by the Lewin Group, Wisconsin will face an RDN shortfall of 25% of unmet demand by 2020.

The Wisconsin Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program provides nutrition education, nutritious foods and improved healthcare access for low-income women and children who are at risk of developing nutrition-related health problems.

The Wisconsin WIC Dietetic Internship Program would address the lack of dietetic internship slots in Wisconsin, enhance the state's nutrition care workforce and positively impact the health status of women and children participating in WIC. The program would annually create new dietetic internship slots for qualified nutritionists currently employed by the Wisconsin WIC program. Upon completion of the internship, the new RDN must remain employed in the WIC program for at least 24 months.

The program will provide significant benefits and the cost to state taxpayers will be minimal or non-existent. The initiative will require roughly \$60,000 in start-up costs and a FTE position at the Department of Health Services to administer the program. However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture authorizes the use of federal WIC funds to support the development and operation of state dietetic internship programs.

LEGISLATIVE REQUEST:

WAND encourages the Legislature to support AB 530 and the creation of the WI WIC Dietetic Internship Program in an effort to: 1.) Strengthen Wisconsin's dietetic and nutrition care workforce; 2.) Enhance the level of nutrition care services provided to WIC recipients; and 3.) Help reduce the occurrence of costly chronic disease.

CONTACT:

For more information, please contact WAND's government affairs consultants Michael Welsh or Tim Hoven at 608-310-8833.



Careers in Dietetics

Becoming a Registered Dietitian or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

Educational and professional requirements

Registered Dietitians (RDs) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) are food and nutrition experts who have met the following criteria and earned the RD or RDN credential:

- **Completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree** at a U.S. regionally accredited university or college or foreign equivalent, and coursework through an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) accredited Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) or Coordinated Program in Dietetics (CP).
- **Complete 1200 hours of supervised practice through an ACEND accredited Dietetic Internship**, Coordinated Program in Dietetics or an Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) offered through an ACEND accredited program.
- **Passed a national examination** administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). For more information regarding the examination, refer to CDR's website at www.cdrnet.org. In order to maintain the credential, an RD or RDN must complete continuing professional educational requirements.

Some RDs or RDNs hold additional certifications in specialized areas of practice. These are awarded through CDR, the credentialing agency for the Academy, and/or through other medical and nutrition organizations. These certifications are recognized within the profession, but not required. Some of the certifications include pediatric or renal nutrition, sports dietetics, oncology, gerontological, nutrition support and diabetes education.

In addition, many states have regulatory laws (i.e. licensure) for food and nutrition practitioners. All states accept the RD or RDN credential for state licensure purposes.

College course work

Dietetics students study a variety of subjects, including food and nutrition sciences, biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, anatomy, chemistry, foodservice systems, business, pharmacology, culinary arts, behavioral social sciences and communication.

Employment opportunities

RDs or RDNs work in a wide variety of settings, including health care, business and industry, community/public health, education, research, government agencies and private practice. Many work environments, particularly those in medical and health-care settings, require that an individual be credentialed as an RD or RDN.

RDs or RDNs work in:

- **Hospitals, clinics or other health-care facilities**, educating patients about nutrition and administering medical nutrition therapy as part of the health-care team. They may also manage the foodservice operations in these settings, or schools, day-care centers or correctional facilities, overseeing everything from food purchasing and preparation to managing staff.
- **Sports nutrition and corporate well ness programs**, educating clients about the connection between food, fitness and health.
- **Food and nutrition-related business and industries**, working in communications, consumer affairs, public relations, marketing, product development or consulting with chefs in restaurants and culinary schools.
- **Private practice**, working under contract with healthcare or food companies, or in their own business. RDs or RDNs work with foodservice or restaurant managers, food vendors and distributors, athletes, nursing home residents or company employees.
- **Community and public health settings**, teaching, monitoring and advising the public and helping improve quality of life through healthy eating habits.
- **Universities and medical centers**, teaching physician's assistants, nurses, dietetics students, dentists and others about the sophisticated science of food and nutrition.
- **Research areas** in food and pharmaceutical companies, universities and hospitals directing or conducting experiments to answer critical nutrition questions and find alternative foods or nutrition recommendations for the public.

Careers in Dietetics

Where to start if you already have a degree:

If you already have a bachelor's degree that is not in dietetics and are interested in becoming a registered dietitian, have your college transcript evaluated by the director of the ACEND accredited dietetic program you wish to attend.

The program director will review your previous academic preparation and identify courses that you will need to complete to meet the educational requirements for dietetic registration. It may be possible to complete the required dietetic coursework while enrolled in a graduate program. The dietetic program director can advise you of your options. Once the required coursework is completed, you are eligible to apply to the ACEND accredited supervised practice program.

Salaries and job outlook

According to the *2011 Compensation & Benefits Survey of the Dietetics Profession*, the median annual income of all RDs or RDNs in the U.S. who have been working in the field for four years or less was \$52,000. As with any profession, salaries and fees vary by region of the country, employment settings, scope of responsibility and supply of RDs or RDNs. Salaries increase with year of experience and many RDs or RDNs, particularly those in business, management, education and research earn incomes above \$90,000.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of dietitians is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2014 because of the increased emphasis on disease prevention, a growing and aging population and public interest in nutrition. Employment in hospitals is expected to show little change because of anticipated slow growth and reduced lengths of hospital stay. Faster growth, however, is anticipated in nursing homes, residential care facilities and physician clinics.

Financial aid

There are many resources to help students pay for college. You may be able to obtain a grant or scholarship from a corporation, community or civic group, philanthropic or religious organization or directly from your chosen school or college. Federal grants and low-interest loans may also be available.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation offers scholarships to encourage eligible students to enter the field of dietetics. Student members of the Academy enrolled in their junior year in an ACEND accredited program may apply for a Foundation scholarship. Scholarships are also available for student members in ACEND accredited dietetic internships and graduate studies. Contact the Academy's Accreditation and Education Programs Team (800/877-1600, ext. 5400 or education@eatright.org) for scholarship information.

Need more information?

Go to www.eatright.org and click on "Become an RD/RDN/DTR" for more information. The site also lists the dietetics education programs accredited by ACEND at www.eatright.org/acend.

For other career guidance information, contact the Accreditation and Education Programs Team.

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Accreditation and Education Programs Team
120 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6995
Phone: 800/877-1600, ext. 5400
Fax: 312/899-4817
E-mail: education@eatright.org

The **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics** is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

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