



MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 6, 2024
TO: Joint Legislative Audit Committee
FROM: Niko Ruud, Administrator, Division of Professional Credential Processing
RE: **Audit Report 23-24: Administration of Professional Credentials**

Thank you, Secretary Hereth, for that introduction, and thank you Chair Wimberger and Chair Wittke for your time and interest in the department.

As Secretary Hereth mentioned I'm an Air Force Academy graduate, former Active Duty Captain in the US Air Force, and currently a captain in the Air National Guard. Now I am the administrator for the Division of Professional Credential Processing at the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services.

I believe that public service is written into my DNA. My grandmother, who helped raise me, was a schoolteacher in the Milwaukee Public School system. My mother, a single parent, raised us while serving her community as a Milwaukee Police Detective. My brother continues to serve on Active Duty as a Navigator in the US Air Force. I am humbled that my career in military and public service is but a small part of this family legacy, and I am honored to have the opportunity to serve all of the families of Wisconsin in my current role.

I have been the division administrator for a year now since January 2023. During that time, the division has been involved in significant and transformative work to modernize our technology and processes. We have been implementing dramatic changes at the same time that we are conceiving, developing, and rolling out the next set of dramatic changes.

It's not without challenge to work in this kind of environment, running multiple legacy systems while simultaneously replacing them with a singular, modern platform. This rate and degree of change would challenge any team. Therefore, creating a culture of innovation was imperative for the investments in process and technology to take hold and yield benefit.

My military background has served me well as I have worked to optimize the investments in our department, and I am proud of the work the division has done to bring better service to the people of Wisconsin.

Our team cannot be here today—they are busy answering phones, processing documents, and issuing licenses. Yet I cannot overstate how important the people are to the improvements we have already achieved and to the sustained success for the division and the department.

Secretary Hereth spoke at a high level about these improvements and the benefits that we have brought to the people of Wisconsin. I want to take this time to offer more detail into some of the changes and how we have achieved such significant progress in a relatively brief amount of time.

When I took over as division administrator, our division was still integrating our processes into the new licensing platform. I quickly realized we needed to not only further break down the project into actionable steps but also prioritize activity that drove the outcomes we wanted. We quickly accomplished the following tasks to recalibrate the division in the wake of this monumental technological shift:

- I consolidated work done in legacy systems, email boxes and manual processes into a new, supervisor driven work queue.
- I set common expectations across the division for application processing to keep document handling under ten calendar days.
- I established a case escalation procedure to allow staff to mark a case High Priority for quicker action or for engagement from a supervisor.
- I broke down the barriers between our various credentialing teams and created a holistic system for our work, creating processes to track and review our core functions and our interactions with business partners such as IT and HR.
- I initiated a division-wide Quality Assurance program to ensure our staff not only processed licenses more quickly, but with a higher degree of attention-to-detail.
- Our Customer Service Center now has the capability to track customer interactions through a case management system. Since March 1, 2023, our staff have been able to close over 86,000 customer support cases, ranging from issues such as resetting passwords, changing names, and requesting assistance with the licensure process.

After we did the hard work of stabilizing the division, we set to work on finding new ways to become more efficient while still focusing on outstanding customer service. I generated a division roadmap, which has enabled our team to deliberately plan proactive work outside of our high demand credentialing times and reduced our need to be reactive.

- We broke one health team into two different health credentialing teams and reclassified an existing agency position to allocate a new supervisor to have more supervision and leadership at the tactical level.
- I invested in our workforce, mandating a two-month cycle of “technical skills training” for our Customer Service Center, ensuring that they have the most up-to-date information for the citizens of Wisconsin.
- We conducted an intensive, ongoing leadership program for our credentialing lead workers and supervisors which gives them access to better tools and techniques for improving performance across all functional areas.

At the same time, the division continued to bring more credentials and licenses into LicenseE. While the efforts I mentioned above would be a lot for any team, we accomplished all of them while also managing two additional major releases. This work required hundreds of hours of staff time, building requirements, conducting discovery sessions with the vendor, and testing over one thousand solutions implemented by our technology partners.

And yet, despite all of this, the division is experiencing record levels of success. As the Secretary mentioned, we are issuing more credentials, more quickly than ever.

There can be no better example of the outcome of these efforts than with the current renewal of registered nurses in the State of Wisconsin. These healthcare professionals are critical to health systems throughout the state. They are also our largest group of license holders by far—we have more than 100,000 active registered nurses in the state.

Because of the hard work we have done over the past year, Wisconsin’s nurses are renewing at a rate that would never have been possible before. On January 10, the renewal window opened and within just ten calendar days we had seen over 40,000 nurses successfully renew their credentials. Today, over 57% of the nursing population has successfully applied to renew, and there are still three weeks left in the renewal window.

I am proud of these numbers, but I'm even prouder of what they represent. Every one of the licenses and renewals belongs to an individual who has dedicated time, energy, and money to a new career. It's Natalie, the pharmacy technician from Evansville who applied for her license last Friday afternoon and had it in hand by 9:30 on Monday morning. It's Bramwell, the Private Security Person from Barron who had their license in less than five days. And it's Neal, the Podiatrist who upon receiving his license said, "You are awesome! Thank you so much for your diligence, patience and extra work on my behalf... I'm very relieved and very appreciative of your help...Thank you again".

I speak on behalf of every member of the division when I say that I am looking forward to building on these successes and to continue improving our outcomes for the citizens of Wisconsin. I look forward to your questions.