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TO: Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution and Federalism
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt
DATE: May 25, 2023
SUBJECT: Testimony in Favor of Senate Bills 189, 190, 192, 193 & 194

Thank you, Chairman Jacque and members of the Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution and Federalism, for allowing me to testify in favor of Senate Bills 189, 190, 192, 193 and 194.

Over the last couple of years, I have heard from many frustrated constituents that are dealing with unnecessary delays, confusion and lack of communication while attempting to get an occupational license from the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS). These unnecessary delays cause individuals to have to postpone starting their careers or stops them from entering the workforce. Wisconsin businesses are struggling to find qualified workers so we need to ensure our licensure process is streamlined and functions efficiently. We cannot afford to fall behind other states in attracting skilled individuals to live and work in our state.

In response, leadership created the Legislative Council Study Committee on Occupational Licenses, and I was honored to be appointed as Chair. The study committee was created with the goal of finding solutions so current and future license holders can be licensed in a timely manner. In other words, we were tasked with finding long-term solutions that will fix the problems plaguing DSPS. The committee was made up of two Republican and two Democratic legislators as well as five members of the public.

Through our conversations with licensed professionals, research and policy groups, and the Department of Safety and Professional Services, our study committee focused our bill recommendations on three primary issue areas: data tracking, workload simplification, and reciprocal credentialing.

Senate Bill 189 and 190 fall under the area of data tracking. The committee felt it was important to have a better handle on the numbers. The committee recommended both bills for introduction: Senate Bill 189, which requires DSPS to include credential processing data in the report it submits to the Legislature every two years; and Senate Bill 190, which requires DSPS to update processing time information on its website every month, so that a person submitting a credential application can anticipate the time for processing. These both require some basic information, such as the number of applications submitted and the median amount of time it's taking to process the applications.

For the second issue, the study committee looked at ways it could help DSPS and applicants have a simpler process, while maintaining integrity in the review of applications. Bills that fall in this issue area include:

- Senate Bill 192, which clarifies that it is the applicant's responsibility to submit all renewal materials before the renewal date and also clarifies that if a complete renewal application is submitted by that date a person's license remains active and in effect.
- Senate Bill 193, which changes the renewal periods from two years to four years.

For the third issue area of reciprocal credentialing, the study committee recommend Senate Bill 194, which expands 2021 Wisconsin Act 10 to allow people in all business and health professions who are licensed in good standing in another state to work in Wisconsin under a preliminary credential while approval of the permanent credential is pending.

Study committee members broadly supported all of these bills and recommended them for introduction. We felt like these bills would improve processes and oversight. Thank you for your support of these bills and feel free to reach out with any questions.



SHAE SORTWELL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony
Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution, and Federalism
May 25, 2023
Senate Bills 189, 190, 192, 193, and 194

Chairman Jacque and members of the Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution, and Federalism – Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on five bills that stemmed from the Study Committee on Occupational Licenses.

The study committee focused its bill recommendations on three issue areas to address the professional licensure backlog at the Department of Safety and Professional Services: data tracking, workload simplification, and reciprocal credentialing.

Senate Bills 189 and 190 fall under the category of data tracking. SB 189 would require DSPPS to supply licensing data in a biennial report that my office has been requesting and still has not received for more than two years. Transparency on processing times is integral to solving any issues that are plaguing the department. SB 190 would require the department to publish the same data on their website, which would be helpful for the public, notably prospective licensees.

Senate Bills 192 and 193 fall under the category of workload simplification. SB 192 would allow licensed professionals to continue working within the scope of their license once they submit their renewal application rather than wait for the department to approve it. This will create less need and urgency to process these applications in order to focus time on other areas. SB 193 would extend renewal times from two to four years instead, which would decrease the workload of the department every year.

Senate Bill 194 applies to reciprocal credentialing. This legislation would expand 2021 Wisconsin Act 10 from most healthcare providers to also include business professions and other healthcare professionals, meaning the department would be required to grant a preliminary credential to these licensed professionals in another state that applied for a permanent credential in Wisconsin.

All of these bills received bipartisan support in the study committee and Joint Legislative Council. It is my hope that they receive the same treatment in this committee and in the full Senate.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this legislation and would gladly answer any questions the committee may have.



May 25, 2023

TO: Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution and Federalism

FROM: Mike Tierney, Legislative Liaison, Department of Safety and Professional Services

RE: Senate Bill 189 - Biennial report on various metrics related to the issuance of occupational credentials

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on Senate Bill 189.

The Department has made strides with licensing and has a great story to share about its progress. Despite record volume of applications, the Department is issuing more licenses, more quickly than in any point in the past seven years. This is the result of creative problem solving, process improvement efforts, as well as significant investments in technology and—thanks to Governor Evers’ allocation of ARPA funding—people. Once the Department completes the multi-year technology modernization that is currently underway, it will be in a position to offer increasingly useful, actionable metrics and information to applicants and other stakeholders.

That said, the Department already produces a biennial report for the Wisconsin legislature, and this report contains information about all of the Department’s divisions and programs. Antiquated, manual legacy systems previously limited the Department’s reporting capabilities, but future reports will reflect the enhanced capabilities of modern software and processes.

The Department launched LicenseE in May 2022 with 72 health care occupations. Since then we have refined the platform and added enhanced functionality in some areas, including nursing—our largest license group. On Monday, May 8, we added more than 60 business occupations to the platform. Now individuals in all those fields have a modern, transparent license application and renewal system.

We understand the interest in data about the Department. Certain metrics, for example, can give applicants meaningful information that can help them successfully and efficiently navigate the process. One purpose of publicly communicating certain data is to provide applicants with relevant information. Data can also help applicants plan for the process and prioritize their efforts. It also helps establish reasonable expectations for both applicants and staff.

We already have experience with this. For example, we have a dashboard in our Division of Industry Services which provides submitters with meaningful information about plan review timelines and the volume of plans received. This enables them to better manage their time and projects.

However, the bill, as introduced, requires the Department to report on arbitrary metrics that will not offer meaningful information to applicants.

I will focus on three of metrics described in the Legislative Reference Bureau summary.

1. “The lowest, highest, and median number of days from the day that an application for initial, renewal, or reciprocal credential is initiated to the date that a final determination is made. DSPS must also separately report these numbers for applications in the health professions, business professions, trades professions, all other professions, and each profession individually.”

There are multiple factors that influence the timing of every application. For example, when this committee met previously, a gentleman who applied for a Licensed Clinical Social Work credential appeared before the committee and testified regarding his licensing delay. He testified that he had been waiting months upon months for a credential. Upon closer inspection we found that he had been authorized to take his national and jurisprudence exams in June 2021. He sat for the jurisprudence exam on December 26, 2021, and took the national exam in the spring of the following year. There was nothing the Department could do in all those months to move the process along. The applicant was completely in control of that timeline—which is his prerogative. But to suggest that the timing was in any way reflective of Department efficiency is entirely disingenuous. And to select these kinds of outlier applications and suggest that they are somehow predictive of future applicants’ experience is misleading. Someone who is motivated to be licensed and who completes requirements in more typical timeframes would have a vastly different experience. Publishing information that is not predictive of the actual application experience could harm Wisconsin’s competitiveness in the labor market.

2. “The median number of contacts made to and received from an applicant for an initial, renewal, or reciprocal credential before a final determination on the applicant's credential is issued. DSPS must also separately report these numbers for each profession.”

The number of times an individual applicant contacts the Department is dependent on myriad factors and offers little predictive value to other applicants. Individuals who submit all required materials without error will have a different experience than someone who makes mistakes or provides the wrong documentation. An individual who has transferred schools will have more documents to submit and more opportunity for questions. An individual who had moved from another jurisdiction where they held a license would have questions that a first-time initial applicant would not. Further, an individual who is preparing to apply may have questions and contact the department. Those contacts could not be recorded in an applicant file, because there is no applicant file until someone submits an application. The reality is that many applicants have questions about the process. They have invested significant time, effort, and money into pursuing a given career path, and they do not want to make a mistake. Also, there are applicants who do not ask questions but do make errors, which require interaction with staff to resolve. Further, there are individuals who move through the process with no need to call or email. Finally, a minority of applicants are frequent callers and emailers for a variety of reasons.

Because we recognize that some applicants have more questions and need more assistance, Governor Evers’ budget included 14 additional call center staff as well as license navigator positions to assist people who need more help. Rather than diverting existing staff time from license evaluation and processing to counting calls and emails, it makes far more sense to invest in staff at a level necessary to ensure that all qualified applicants move through the system efficiently and successfully. The Joint Finance Committee has at this point removed the navigators from the budget, and yet returning these positions would yield meaningful outcomes for many, many applicants. Counting calls and emails offers limited, if any, value and certainly does not yield any information that helps any applicant plan for or navigate the process.

3. “The number of applications for initial, renewal, and reciprocal credentials for which DSPS or a credentialing board requested more information. DSPS must also separately report these numbers for each profession.”

When a person initiates the application process, either by endorsement or examination, staff then prepare an application checklist. This checklist tracks documents and application status. Wisconsin is a primary-source state, which means that some documents must come from the originating institution. A college must provide a transcript. A test center must provide a test result. For most applications, additional documentation arrives after initial application and payment. Upon renewal, an applicant reporting a conviction or name change will result in requests for information from the Department. This data point offers no apparent value to applicants but does create additional work for staff, and this additional work would divert them from actual license application review and processing.

Further, while some of this reporting potentially could be automated, this bill contains no funding for necessary software modifications. It contains no funding for additional staff reporting activity. Nor does the bill contain a delayed effective date to ensure the software is built and in place. The bill is also silent on the staffing needed to gather the data necessary to produce the data required for the report. As such, it would potentially delay licensing for all applicants by requiring staff to spend time assembling information for a report that applicants might never even read.

Again, the department has a great story to tell. While the volume of applications is far greater than at any time in the department’s past, the fact is that we are issuing far more credentials than ever before. We now receive contacts from other states that recognize our success and seek out our advice. In the biennial reports that we produce moving forward the data presented will not be arbitrary, but data that will demonstrate to employers and applicants how well the system we now have in place enables them to have a level of success they could not achieve before.