



MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony on SB 702

Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges

Senator Mary Felzkowski

12th Senate District

December 6th, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman Feyen and Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Senate Bill 702, which would establish the framework to provide our technical colleges with \$20 million to invest in Wisconsin's oral healthcare workforce.

In the 2023-25 State Budget, the Legislature included \$20 million in one-time funding for our technical colleges to expand oral health care programs on their campuses and allow for the training of more dental hygienists, dental assistants and other oral healthcare providers.

64 of Wisconsin's 72 counties are designated as dental access shortage areas. Practicing dentists in these areas state that one of their key impediments in providing services to Wisconsinites living in these areas is a severe shortage in hygienists, assistants, and other supporting members of the dental care team. This staff shortage crisis has led to higher costs and longer wait times for patients receiving dental care.

The majority of technical colleges have waitlists for the programs that train these providers, and dental hygiene programs are typically the highest-cost programs with the lowest student ratios, creating a more unique barrier to the creation and expansion of these programs. These programs are ripe for, and could greatly benefit from, a one-time infusion of dollars, which have already been set aside in the budget, to increase access to this important workforce pipeline.

This bill provides the parameters under which the Technical College System can use and apply for these grant dollars. The bill puts in place a fair and transparent formula for the use of the dollars, ensuring equal opportunity for technical colleges across the state that may have an interest in expanding their oral healthcare programs, or starting new provider programs, while also detailing the eligible types of expenditures allowed. You will hear from some of the technical colleges today on how they plan to use these funds.

Based on the parameters specified in the bill, the Technical College System Board would submit a plan for expenditure of the funds to the Joint Committee on Finance, which would need to sign off on the plan.

This bill is a significant step towards increasing the number of oral health care providers in our state and we hope to gain your support as a committee for this legislation. I will be happy to take any questions.



PAUL MELOTIK

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**Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 667 / SB 702
Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges
Wednesday, December 6, 2023**

Thank you to the members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges for the opportunity to provide support of AB667 / SB702. This important piece of legislation will further enable our Technical Colleges to access \$20 million in one-time grant funding to expand our state's oral healthcare workforce.

The current shortage of dental providers spans nearly the entire state. According to information from the Wisconsin Dental Association, in 2022, forty-nine percent of dental offices were trying to recruit a dental hygienist, forty-two percent of the offices were trying to recruit a dental assistant, and nearly half of dental offices have had to cut hours because of staffing shortages.

Additionally, the majority of technical colleges have waitlists for these programs, and dental hygiene programs are typically the highest-cost programs with the lowest student ratios, creating a more unique barrier to the creation and expansion of these programs. Due to the high need and unique barriers presented in expanding oral healthcare programs, there was \$20 million set aside in the 2023-25 State Budget for the purpose of expanding Wisconsin's dental programs at our technical colleges.

This bill provides parameters for release of the funding to the Technical College System Board for this purpose, which include:

- Safeguards to ensure the dollars are being spent appropriately and for the intended purpose, such as reporting requirements and Joint Finance Committee approval
- A fair and transparent formula which allows equal opportunity for technical colleges across the state to potentially access the funds
- Matching requirements so that our technical colleges also have some skin in the game when making these investments
- The allowance of one-time expenditures for capital buildouts, such as new dental chairs and facility improvements and expansions, instructional supplies, and instructor hiring bonuses

While this legislation puts in place these important parameters on use of the funds, the plan still will need final approval from the Joint Committee on Finance.

Thank you again for hearing my support for AB667 / SB702. Our dental partners are desperate for opportunities to increase the pipeline of oral healthcare workforce so I hope you can join me in support this important piece of legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Melotik", written over a horizontal line.

Paul Melotik

District 24 Representative



December 6, 2023

Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges
Layla Merrifield, Executive Director
SB-702 - Funding for Technical College Oral Health Care Programs

Thank you, Chairman Feyen, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak today. Wisconsin's technical colleges ask for your support for this bill to expand and support the oral health care workforce pipeline.

Technical colleges currently operate eight dental hygiene programs and 14 dental assistant programs, either as short-term technical diplomas or one-year CODA programs. Employment rates for these graduates range from 96% to 99%, six months after graduation. We know from our employer-partners that even more graduates are needed, and every year, we have more qualified students than we can accommodate in our hygienist programs. We also know that most of Wisconsin's counties are considered dental health shortage areas, and simply don't have enough dentists, hygienists, or assistants.

That shortage is pervasive in rural northern, western, and central Wisconsin counties. North-central Technical College (NTC) is uniquely well-situated to help address these shortages, headquartered as they are in Wausau, with successful hygiene and assistant programs, ready and willing to expand into dental therapy.

On the other hand, dental education is uniquely challenging to provide at scale. Our students receive hands-on education from industry experts, who have years of experience as working dentists. Accreditation standards mandate that clinical process courses have student-faculty ratios no higher than 5 to 1 for hygienists, or 6 to 1 for assistants. Each student requires dedicated lab space to practice their skills. All of these factors contribute to operating costs of up to \$30,000 per year, per hygiene student. Dental chairs and other operatory equipment are highly specialized and capital-intensive. Even modestly-sized labs cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to properly equip, and easily surpass \$1 million when necessary facility improvements are included. At the same time, technical colleges are also hearing growing demands for more qualified graduates in health care programs, IT, skilled trades, manufacturing, emergency responders, and many other fields. We are increasingly challenged to meet each of these needs.

We appreciate our partners, particularly the bill authors, the Joint Finance Committee, and the Wisconsin Dental Association. We thank them for their ongoing support and collaboration on behalf of oral health programs offered by technical colleges. Thanks also to the Marquette dental school, rural public health advocates, and Wisconsin's community health centers, and all who have worked tirelessly toward the shared goal of access to dental care for all Wisconsinites. We ask for this committee's support to continue this important work. Thank you.



Dr. Morna K. Foy, President

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Senate Bill 702
Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges
December 6, 2023

Chairman Feyen and Members of the Committee:

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) asks for your support for Senate Bill 702. These bills specify parameters related to the \$20 million one-time investment in oral health care programs at technical colleges provided in the 2023-25 biennial budget. This pivotal investment will allow colleges to expand capacity in their in-demand oral health care programs and contribute a skilled workforce to the dental industry.

Fourteen technical colleges currently offer dental assistant programs, enrolling more than 600 students per year. In addition, half of all technical colleges offer dental hygienist programs, enrolling more than 1,300 students per year and producing strong outcomes. WTCS dental hygienist graduates experience a 97% employment rate in their field within six months of graduation and earn competitive, family-supporting salaries. More details can be found in the WTCS 2022 Graduate Outcomes Report:

<https://www.wtcsystem.edu/assets/Uploads/Publications/Report/WTCS-2022-Graduate-Outcomes.pdf>

These high-quality, industry-aligned oral health care programs are equipment and facilities intensive. Students receive hands-on educational experiences in on-site clinic settings that mirror their future workplaces. Dental chairs and facility improvements such as floor trenching and waterlines are required to expand program capacity. Additional funding will help technical colleges continue to invest in equipment, facilities and supplies that support the expansion of oral health programming capacity and produce real-world clinic experiences that prepare students to succeed.

The strength of WTCS oral health care programs is driven in part by the experts in the dental field that serve as faculty and clinic supervisors. Without dentists and dental professionals to lend their expertise in the classroom and the clinics, students are limited in their ability to complete their coursework and move into the workforce. Competitive faculty salaries are essential for recruiting and retaining industry experts and sustaining programming capacity. Additional funding to pay hiring bonuses to oral health care instructors supports colleges in their efforts to address their own skilled talent shortages and incentivizes more dental experts to educate WTCS students, ensuring students are work-ready for this essential industry.

Please support Senate Bill 702 and the support provided for WTCS colleges' work to produce a skilled oral health care workforce for Wisconsin. Thank you for your consideration.

COLLEGES: Blackhawk, Chippewa Valley, Fox Valley, Gateway, Lakeshore, Madison College, Mid-State, Milwaukee Area, Moraine Park, Nicolet College, Northcentral, Northeast Wisconsin, Northwood Tech, Southwest Tech, Waukesha County, Western

Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges | December 6, 2023
RE: SB 702

Greetings members of the Committee. I'm Dr. Jeannie Worden, President of Northcentral Technical College. Established in 1912, NTC serves all or part of ten counties in central Wisconsin covering 5,900 square miles with a main campus in Wausau and regional campuses in Antigo, Medford, Spencer, Phillips and Wittenberg. I am sharing my testimony in support of SB 702.

NTC's service area is primarily rural and lacks adequate oral healthcare. According to the Rural Health Information Hub, all but two counties in NTC's District are entirely in Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), with the remaining two counties considered partial shortage areas. Studies have shown that rural communities lack access to oral health providers due to geographic isolation and workforce shortages, poor health literacy, and difficulty navigating the oral health system—all of which impact oral and general health.

Wisconsin's technical colleges are the only higher education institutions within the State that offer dental hygienist and dental assistant programs. Currently, the Commission on Dental Accreditation, or CODA, accredits 8 dental hygienist programs and 6 dental assisting programs within the 16 Wisconsin technical colleges. All 16 Wisconsin technical colleges are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, the same organization that accredits University of Wisconsin and other accredited four-year colleges in the State and Midwest. Our colleges are committed to the accreditation process because it is an additional assurance that we are providing the high quality program our learners and employers expect.

NTC currently offers both an accredited Dental Hygienist associate degree program and a Dental Assistant technical diploma program and is well poised to expand our educational

portfolio to include Dental Therapy. As the community's college, we are able to remain responsive to the many industries, including oral health, who rely on us to be flexible, responsive and supportive of their workforce needs. We work diligently to create multiple pathways for students to ensure we are providing both a skilled workforce and supporting incumbent worker training and education. And, while we are proud of our existing programs, facilities, labs and clinic, we recognize that we need to continue to evolve with and respond to industry. Investing in technical college oral health care programs would allow us to both expand our current dental hygienist and dental assistant programs, and develop a new dental therapy program and curriculum if dental therapy becomes an authorized dental practice.

Similar to the process we followed when we were initially accredited for our dental hygiene program, we will hire a qualified Dental Therapy Program Director and work with CODA to get our "initial accreditation" for dental therapy that assures our program has the potential for meeting the standards set forth in the requirements for an accredited educational program for the specific occupational area. After the initial site evaluation visit(s), we will enroll students and proceed with the requirements and timelines outlined by CODA for full accreditation. CODA ensures Dental Therapy training programs educate their graduates to meet a level of competency in the services which they will be providing. We are confident in our ability to meet the CODA requirements of dental therapy programs and we are committed to seeing the accreditation process through. Our longstanding commitment to accreditation and quality assurance on both an institutional and program level ensures we are well positioned for success.

Of note:

- Our faculty meet high credentialing requirements and hold current licensures as outlined by the Higher Learning Commission and CODA.



• We have established active program advisory committees led by and made up of leaders in the dental industry.

- We have established partnerships with dentists and clinics for on-site clinical opportunities, and
- We have an on-site dental clinic that provides low cost dental care services for underserved and lower socioeconomic populations and have identified how to expand its footprint to add dental therapy programming. NTC's clinic will allow dental therapy students to collaborate daily with dental assistant and dentist hygienist students, as well as receive oversight by the dentists who work within the program.

As President of NTC, it is my responsibility to ensure there is a trained workforce within the College's district to meet high demand needs. The need for dental therapists and dental hygienists to support dentists in their overwhelming responsibility to care for every person residing within Wisconsin's borders is one of the areas that NTC is prepared to support.

Your investment is significant to our ability to expand the state's oral health care workforce.

With your support, we anticipate:

- Enrolling 12 dental therapy students annually beginning in fall 2025
- Admitting 16 Dental Hygiene students in fall and 16 in spring beginning Fall 2024 (an *additional* 8 students annually for a total of 32 students)
- Enrolling an *additional* 12 Expanded Function Dental Auxiliary students in fall and spring beginning in fall 2026
- Expenditures for clinic and lab expansion and remodeling including the addition of eight dental chairs for a dental therapy program and an additional twelve chairs for the dental hygiene program



- Expenditures for instructional supplies, software and equipment to support a new dental therapy program and expansion of the College's dental assistant and dental hygiene programs

Wisconsin's technical colleges have a reputation for stepping up when the community has a need and this is no exception. The introduction of Dental Therapy and the expansion of technical college oral health care programs are an important part of the solution to addressing oral health issues and increasing access to dental care and we are grateful for the support and advocacy from Senator Felzkowski to bring this legislation forward. Thank you for considering the positive impact NTC and Wisconsin's Technical Colleges can have on the expansion of the state's oral health care workforce.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Jeannie Worden
President, Northcentral Technical College

Memo

TO	Chair Feyen and Members of the Senate Economic Development and Technical Colleges Committee
FROM	Doug Ballweg, President & CEO, Delta Dental of Wisconsin
DATE	December 6, 2023
RE	Support of Senate Bill 702, Funding for Tech College Oral Health Programs

Thank you, Chairman Feyen and members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges, for taking time to consider this important bill on oral health access. Delta Dental of Wisconsin (DDWI) believes this bill, when combined with other bills the Wisconsin legislature is considering relating to dental therapy and the dental workforce, is a helpful step in moving Wisconsin forward toward better access to oral health care, especially in our rural areas.

In the past two years the DDWI Foundation has committed to spend over \$750,000 to support the expansion of dental hygiene and dental assisting programs at Chippewa Valley, Fox Valley, and Madison Technical Colleges. In addition, DDWI and the DDWI Foundation have awarded dental assisting and dental hygienist scholarships at multiple technical colleges for over a decade. The legislature's proposed program for deploying \$20 million in funding for oral health care workforce initiatives at Wisconsin's Technical Colleges is directly in line with our efforts and we urge passage of SB 702. We look forward to exploring ways we can work together with the legislature in continuing to assist with the expansion of programs designed to expand the number of oral health care professionals in the state.

One way we have historically collaborated with the State of Wisconsin in providing support to both dental patients and professionals in an effort to improve oral health care for all Wisconsinites is the Seal-a-Smile program. Through a partnership with Wisconsin Department of Health Services, DDWI and the DDWI Foundation have contributed more than \$5 million to this program, which provides oral health screenings, fluoride varnish, and sealants when necessary to elementary students across Wisconsin, at no cost to participants. Typically, 70,000 students participate with nearly half receiving dental sealants.

Memo

DDWI also realizes the importance of supporting providers who choose to work in underserved areas. DDWI currently does this through a fellowship program where our Foundation provides funding for up to three recent Marquette University School of Dentistry graduates to participate in an advanced general dentistry training program that focuses on the needs of low-income patients in rural areas. To complement this fellowship program, the DDWI Foundation established a Service Loan Repayment Program, which provides financial assistance up to \$100,000 in loan repayments for dentists who commit to providing dental care in designated underserved geographical areas.

In addition, DDWI has long been a proponent of licensing dental therapists in Wisconsin, and we laud the work Senator Felzkowski and others have done to move the policy this far. Our message on dental therapy has been consistent in that it is one necessary piece to a broader set of reforms. It can help reduce costs, provide greater access to care by allowing for another pathway toward becoming a dental professional in Wisconsin and it can also facilitate the expansion of dentist supervised services into additional settings, such as nursing homes, veteran facilities, schools, hospitals, mobile clinics, and satellite dental clinics. Community clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers are too valuable an asset to the citizens of Wisconsin to continue to put them at risk. Long-term solutions like employing dental therapists are needed to address the workforce and reimbursement issues they face.

Thank you again for your attention to this important matter. We encourage the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technical Colleges to support SB 702.

Sincerely,



Doug Ballweg
President/CEO
Delta Dental of Wisconsin