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### Testimony Supporting the Passage of SB 89

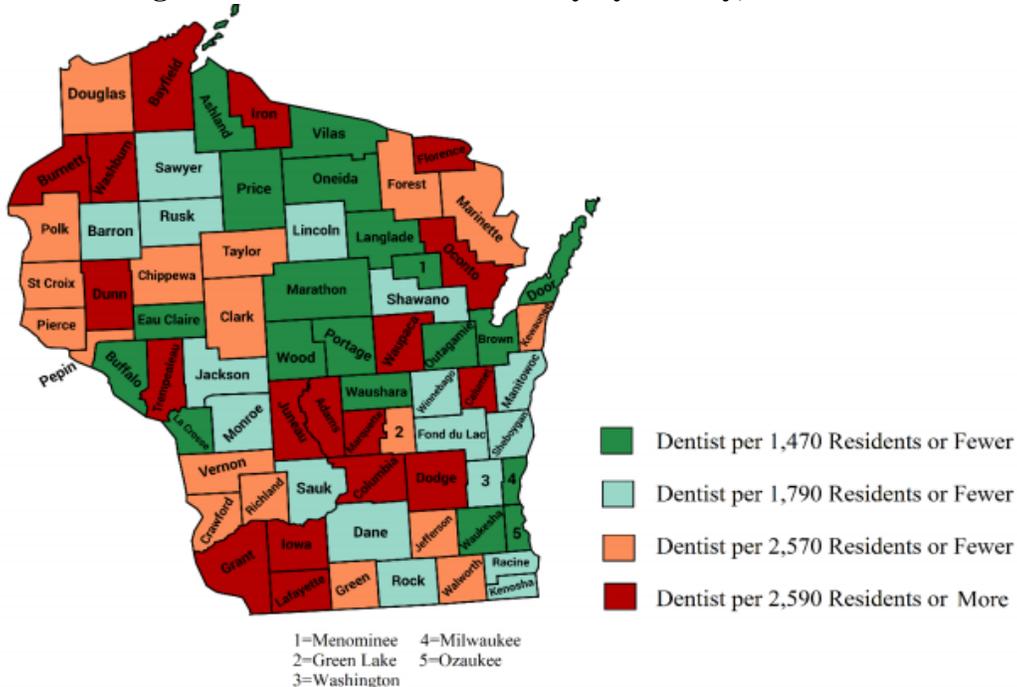
Dear Chairman Testin and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 89. Dental therapy licensure, which has worked in other states, can give Wisconsinites greater access to dental care and help to decrease costs. We're glad to see that this bill is bipartisan and we strongly encourage its passage.

Wisconsin has a dental-care access problem. Particularly in rural areas, many people go without regular dental care,<sup>i</sup> which can cause health problems later in life.<sup>ii</sup> The reasons for the lack of dental care are myriad, but most commonly come down to cost. According to a recent poll by the University of Michigan<sup>iii</sup>, 69% of middle-aged adults nationwide with unmet dental needs cited cost as a major factor.

Likewise, in the Badger State, affordable dental care remains out of reach for far too many people. Many businesses do not offer dental coverage through their health plans, and the costs of routine procedures can be too much for low and middle-income families to afford. Fortunately, there is a common sense solution to bring dental costs down: dental therapy licensure.

**Figure 1. Dental Care Availability by County, Wisconsin**



Currently in Wisconsin, most dental care can only be provided by an individual with a doctoral degree in dentistry. A law authorizing dental therapists would create the opportunity for alternative, mid-level practitioners to engage in some of the more straightforward procedures that currently require a full dental license, freeing up dentists to focus on more complex procedures.

Three states have created dental therapy licenses—Maine, Vermont, and Minnesota. A recent case study<sup>iv</sup> in Minnesota found that a dental therapist working in a rural part of the state had financial productivity that was within 8-15% of dentists in her practice, but at 30-50% lower hourly cost.

In addition to the potential lowering costs, a dental therapy license may help increase access to dental care for rural residents. Dental therapists are generally allowed to work outside of the physical presence of the dentist who is the supervisor, which can enable them to travel to isolated communities that lack access to care. They are authorized to conduct routine procedures such as filling cavities and conducting non-surgical extractions of teeth.

The dental therapy license is an idea that has received bi-partisan support in Wisconsin already—having been included by Governor Evers in his budget. In 2018, a bill was proposed in Wisconsin by Senators Craig and Kapenga. This bill would have created the license for Wisconsin. However, the legislation did not make it out of committee. Now, the Wisconsin legislature has a second chance to become a leader in a form of healthcare innovation that can have a real, meaningful impact on the lives of Wisconsin families struggling to afford dental care.

We urge the legislature to pass SB 89. Thank you for your consideration.

CJ Szafir  
Executive Vice President  
WILL

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/healthcare-policy-brief\\_final2-1.pdf](http://www.will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/healthcare-policy-brief_final2-1.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475>

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.healthyagingpoll.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/NPHA\\_Dental-Report\\_final.pdf](http://www.healthyagingpoll.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/NPHA_Dental-Report_final.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.appletreedental.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ADT-Rural-Jodi-Hagers-Case-Study-022118.pdf>