



Wisconsin State Legislature

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November 9, 2017

The Importance of the Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact

For the last seventeen years, nurses in Wisconsin have been able to easily practice in other states because of an agreement between states that allows nurses to obtain a multi-state license. This multi-state license was in jeopardy until the legislature passed a bill at the beginning of the month ratifying a new agreement between states regarding nurse licensure. Wisconsin was a party to the original nurse licensure compact that was ratified in 2000, but only four states, including Wisconsin, are still a part of the old compact. Twenty-six states have ratified the new enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact (eNLC) that was approved in 2015. Along with my legislative colleagues, I sponsored and voted for a bill to ratify the eNLC. Senate Bill 417 has cleared both houses of the legislature and is awaiting Governor Scott Walker's signature.

There are some clear reasons why the state should ratify the compact. For example, it allows nurses who live near Wisconsin borders to work in a neighboring state, and allows out-of-state nurses to fill positions and ensure adequate staffing in hospitals, nursing homes and elsewhere. Currently, there are about 500 nurses who live in Wisconsin and practice in another state and vice versa. In addition, the eNLC helps military spouses find a new job if their spouse is deployed to a base in another state because their multi-state license allows them to work in more places.

In the 21st century, telemedicine is becoming more widely used. The eNLC allows a nurse licensed in one state to provide telemedicine to individuals in other states. This is especially helpful for Wisconsin's many snowbirds, as the people who head to Arizona and Florida for the

cold winter months and return to the state in the spring are affectionately known. The nursing compact allows their Wisconsin-based nurses to follow up with them over the phone when they are in another state without having a specific license to practice in that state. The new compact, much like the original one, does not water-down licensure standards, but rather ensures the state has the ability to hold nurses practicing in Wisconsin to our high standards. What's more, because of new technology and national databases that are now available, the eNLC ensures that nurses licensed through the compact meet the appropriate background check benchmarks.

As parts of the country recover from hurricanes and wildfires, the need for multi-state nurse licensure is readily apparent. The enhanced nurse compact lets nurses help with recovery efforts during and after natural disasters. After Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, many nurses arrived in the state to help care for sick and injured people. Texas had to issue 600 temporary licenses for nurses who were licensed in non-compact states. This regulatory burden hit the state when resources were already stretched thin.

Only 0.13 percent of the nurses currently licensed in Wisconsin have a single-state license. Clearly, the stakes were high. If the legislature had not passed the eNLC by the end of the year, the vast majority of the state's nurses would have lost their ability to work in other states without obtaining specific licenses in other states. Public support for ratification of the compact was apparent. When the legislative committees held public hearings on the ratification bills, no one testified or registered against the bills. Senate Bill 417 was approved by both houses of the legislature on a voice vote. I am confident that the Governor will sign Senate Bill 417 before the compact deadline, ensuring that multi-state licensure will continue.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.