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Ann Zenk
Senior VP Workforce and Clinical Practice
Wisconsin Hospital Association
5510 Research Park Drive
P.O. Box 259038
Madison, WI 53725-9038

Tim Size
Executive Director
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative
880 Independence Lane
Sauk City, WI 53583

Dear Ms. Zenk and Mr. Size:

Thank you for your recent letter of support and offer of partnership to all the presidents of Wisconsin's technical colleges. On their behalf, I want to affirm the strong partnership that the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and your associations have maintained over the years, dating back to the work we did together to address the nursing shortage crisis nearly 20 years ago. Since that time, members of your organizations have actively engaged in developing and prioritizing WTCS healthcare program offerings by serving on program advisory boards and college governing boards, supporting clinical offerings, providing job shadow opportunities to high school students, and offering scholarships to students in healthcare programs. The support of your members has reinforced WTCS's ability to address bottlenecks by expanding virtual reality and simulation, funding CNA programs and testing, providing virtual and distance education, and creating on-site work-based learning opportunities.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, WTCS had been raising alarms regarding the looming healthcare worker crisis driven by an aging population and increased retirements. The pandemic exacerbated this worker shortage. Anecdotally, our healthcare students have raised concerns about vaccination requirements, difficult work, demanding conditions, and compensation levels. Students have also faced challenges with their high school preparation, limited clinical availability, and the time and cost of completing their programs. Despite these concerns, healthcare remains one of the strongest career pathways and the largest program area within WTCS: healthcare students compose 29% of total enrollments and nursing assistant remains one of the largest dual enrollment programs. While total WTCS enrollments have dipped in recent years, healthcare program enrollments have remained comparatively more stable.

We agree that healthcare programs should remain a priority and WTCS has devoted resources to reduce barriers to this pathway. We are exploring new ways to connect high school students to healthcare pathways and expand the talent pipeline for these essential jobs. Open Educational Resources (OERs), educational materials that are in the public domain and free to students, are being utilized in WTCS nursing, nursing assistant, and medical terminology courses and are continuously being developed in

other program areas. Our colleges are using funding from a leadership grant to create a System-wide Healthcare Simulation program that ensures students at all 16 technical colleges receive the same simulation experience, the first System-wide program of its kind in the country. Healthcare programs have been featured as pathways to promising careers in promotional materials and we are in the final stages of two video stories showcasing nursing programs. The WTCS Board regularly acknowledges the contributions of local employers and recently honored ThedaCare for their partnership and collaboration with a local college.

Unfortunately, WTCS finds itself in an unprecedented period of demand for help to sustain Wisconsin's essential workforce across industries including manufacturing, agriculture, public safety and healthcare. I appreciate that you have already reached out to your local technical colleges to discuss immediate solutions. At the same time, we need more significant and long-term assistance from the state and that is why your support of the WTCS 2023-25 state biennial budget request has never been more important. Our colleges need new General Purpose Revenue (GPR) investments, and we need your support to encourage the Administration and Legislature to make these investments.

Specifically, WTCS is requesting \$75 million to build upon our proven strategies to expand quality education and training opportunities for healthcare and other careers throughout the state. These new GPR funds will allow colleges to continue to innovate and develop new tools to educate, recruit and retain students. In addition, WTCS is requesting \$3 million to expand the use of OER with the goal of increasing student access and affordability. Please encourage your members to reach out to their state policymakers to voice their support for these important budget requests.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership. I would be happy to discuss how we can work together to build a strong healthcare workforce for Wisconsin.



Morna K. Foy, PhD
President

cc: Eric Borgerding, Wisconsin Hospital Association President and Chief Executive Officer
Colleen McCabe, Wisconsin Technical College System Provost & Vice President
Danielle Cook, Wisconsin Technical College System Education Director-Health Sciences
Layla Merrifield, Wisconsin Technical College District Board Association
Wisconsin Technical College System Presidents Association