



# EDWARD BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Testimony – Assembly Bill 795  
Assembly Committee on Mining and Rural Development

February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016

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Chairman Kulp and Members,

I appreciate the ability to testify on the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, and on AB 795, which increases funding for the Youth Apprenticeship Grant Program.

Closing the skills gap is a vital step toward increasing workforce opportunities. I've spoken to several employers in my district who have openings for family supporting jobs, but too few applicants.

Young people need to be exposed to the variety of good careers available in rural areas – and the State of Wisconsin has a program that has been doing that in one form or another for twenty-five years – the Youth Apprenticeship Grant Program.

Youth apprenticeship grants encourage community partnerships. High schools, tech colleges, and local businesses work together to equip young people with the skills they need to meet regional labor demands.

The program allows students to learn in demand job skills in a hands on way. Young people work with their teachers and with local employers to learn a trade and see first-hand how to apply their classroom studies in the work environment.

AB 795 increases funding for Youth Apprenticeship Grants by \$500,000 in fiscal year 2016-17, a 22.5% increase. This increase is designed to bring the program in line with demand, and would provide the program with a total of \$2,723,700 for FY '16-'17. This increase comes on the heels of a \$1 million increase over the previous biennium that passed with bi-partisan support. The legislature has seen fit to invest in this program in the past, and now is the time to renew our commitment.

Over the last twenty-five years, apprenticeships have positively changed many lives, and this funding increase will bolster the already good work of this fine program. I will accept questions at this time.



TO: Assembly Committee on Mining and Rural Development  
Representative Kulp, Chair

FROM: Jeremy Levin, MHA, Director of Advocacy

DATE: February 4, 2016

RE: SUPPORT Rural Wisconsin Initiative

The Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC), owned and operated by forty rural community hospitals, thanks you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on the seven bills that comprise the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. RWHC thanks the 21 lawmakers who have authored this effort.

RWHC has long supported cross-sector collaboration and realizes the need to improve more than just community health status, and that is why we wholeheartedly support the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. Some of our member hospitals have taken to community initiatives aimed at retaining a younger workforce by collaborating with high schools and tech schools to make sure students will have the skills needed to match the jobs available and other members have worked with employers in the area to make sure there is adequate child care available to entice young families to their communities and the jobs available.

#### AB793

Attracting and retaining good teachers is a challenge for rural schools. Health care has faced similar workforce challenges and one tool to attract health care workers have been loan forgiveness programs; these should be tried to attract new teachers, too. Such a program could help new teachers decide where to settle and where to teach, just as health care loan forgiveness programs are tied to practice. It would also encourage students interested in teaching to come back to their hometowns after their educations are complete, rural health education programs, such as the Wisconsin Academy Rural Medicine, seek a rural background to also gauge chance to practice in rural areas.

#### AB794

This bill requires the Higher Educational Aids Board to make student loan reimbursement payments on behalf of rural county residents. These "rural opportunity zones" will look to incentivize young people looking to relocate after finishing their post-secondary education. Currently, the demographics of rural areas skew older than more urban and suburban areas in the state; likewise, rural health care providers reflect these demographics and as they retire, good health care jobs will be available.

#### AB795

RWHC believes that the \$500,000 increase in Youth Apprenticeship program is another valuable tool for students. The program is designed for high school students who want hands-on learning in an occupational area



with classroom instruction. The funds go to rural schools, tech colleges and businesses that are working together to equip students with the skills they will need to succeed in their local industries.

#### AB796

The increase in the Apprenticeship Completion Award program, which partially reimburses eligible apprentices, sponsors and employers for certain costs of related instruction, will continue to support “on the job” training. Health care has had a long history in apprenticeship learning across different health provider professionals. This can support other health care focused entities like the Wisconsin Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) that seeks to improve access to quality health care by developing community-based health professions training programs and enhancing health education resources across the state by allowing students to experience firsthand the challenges, opportunities and rewards of health professions.

#### AB797

This bill supports the Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program (WRPRAP), which has successfully drawn physicians to rural communities. In 2011, RWHC Proposed the Wisconsin Rural Training Track Collaborative to the WRPRAP for start-up funding. In just three years these funds have made it possible to grow from the Collaborative’s initial eight organizations interested in developing and sustaining rural graduate medical education (GME) funding, to 28 hospitals, clinics, and residencies investigating and developing rural GME, and that number is growing. The new bill would propose an increase of WRPRAP funding by \$250,000, to strengthen residency programs for doctors pursuing obstetrics and gynecology specialties.

#### AB798

We support enhanced funding for rural broadband expansion grants. In 2007, RWHC Information Technology Network (ITN) incorporated as a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to providing member hospitals with shared health information services. In 2013, RWHC ITN became one of the first networks in the country to be designated as a Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Consortium, helping 29 hospitals and nearly 70 sites apply for broadband funding through the new FCC HCF subsidy program.

#### AB799

The proposed Rural STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) Grant legislation will help small school districts in rural Wisconsin communities start, expand, and maintain STEM education programs. These education programs help to shape students’ interests and prepare them to pursue the high wage, high demand careers that are involved in advance manufacturing that can be found in rural areas.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on and express our support for the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. We encourage the Committee to act on these bills so that they might become law and more can be done to help rural areas and the health care providers that serve these areas of Wisconsin.