



TO: Assembly Committee on Health  
Representative Severson, Chair

FROM: Jeremy Levin, Director of Advocacy  
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative

DATE: October 22, 2013

RE: SUPPORT Assembly Bill 453 – Relating to uses and disclosures of protected health information

The Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC), owned and operated by 39 rural community hospitals, thanks you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on Assembly Bill 453 which relates to uses and disclosures of protected health information. RWHC thanks the authors, Representative Severson and Senator Vukmir, for introducing legislation that will increase patient safety further by more robust integration of medical records and services.

The Mental Health Care Coordination Bill updates Wisconsin law to be consistent with Federal HIPAA privacy and security law and allows health care providers to communicate treatment information about a patient with other providers that are also treating the patient. This bill reflects a more modern, integrated medicine approach for individuals with mental health needs by removing statutory restrictions on psychiatrists and other mental health providers from coordinating a patient's care with the patient's other treating providers that currently results in less coordinated, less integrated, and more costly care for individuals with mental illness. However, this bill also maintains existing special confidentiality for "psychotherapy notes" as well as patient rights to request restrictions on the disclosure of health information, thereby reflecting concerns that too much information might be shared.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on and express our support for AB 453. We encourage the Committee to act on this bill, so that it might become law and help health care professionals better serve patients in Wisconsin's underserved rural areas. The Mental Health Care Coordination Bill has been a long time coming and we are encouraged by the unanimous support that the idea received from the Speaker's Mental Health Task Force. Wisconsin needs to amend its mental health law to end this disparate treatment of persons with mental health diagnoses and remove statutory restrictions on psychiatrists and other mental health providers from coordinating a patient's care with the patient's other providers.