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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Felzkowski: Perseverance Pays Off

If you had asked me, when I took my oath of office in 2013, what I'd guess one of my proudest achievements would someday be as a legislator, I never would have guessed that it would be a dental care bill that took me 8 years to pass. Dental therapists are mid-level providers, much like physician's assistants, who are members of the dental care team serving under the supervision of a dentist. They can help dental practices increase access and lower practice costs, all without compromising quality of care...and, as of this week, they can now exist and practice in the state of Wisconsin.

This past Wednesday morning, on January 31st, 2024, Governor Evers signed my dental therapy bill into law at Northcentral Technical College, surrounded by members of our coalition who have dedicated hundreds of hours throughout the years advocating for this policy and helping me get it across the finish line. It was a surreal moment.

My biggest takeaway from these last 8 years of work is this: that perseverance pays off, and that tenacity is a key ingredient for any undertaking in politics and public policy. As I looked around me during the bill signing, it was a far different picture from the one I had in my head when I started this journey. The President of NTC, a wonderful and industrious partner in this endeavor, had taken over for her predecessor, one of my most formidable allies and a true champion of dental therapy. The Governor signing his name wasn't the one who held that office when these conversations began. Next to me stood former opponents of the bill, with whom my colleagues and I battled and compromised with, a fight that took twists and turns and made me a better legislator. Countless advocates stood on both sides of me, some converted believers, and some who had been by my side for this entire journey - their unwavering faith in this bill keeping me going when we took hit after hit. Our dental therapy bill also no longer stood alone - it was signed along with a \$20 million investment in our technical colleges for the oral health workforce that I negotiated, and a collection of other dental access bills.

I think it's easier today than it has ever been to look out at the path before you, muddled with obstacles and naysayers and cynics, throw up your hands in defeat, and turn away from a challenge. But good things aren't meant to come easily, and if you really believe in what's at the end of that road, you can't give yourself the option to give up. The pen I hold in my hand today, used to sign my bill into law, is proof that it's worth it. And several years from now, when Wisconsin graduates its first dental therapist, I know that in a way, it'll feel like it's my own child graduating.

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