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Testimony on Assembly Bill 824 and Senate Bill 695 January 30, 2018

Chairmen and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of Assembly Bill 824 and Senate Bill 695.

Wisconsin's tailgating laws prohibit motor vehicles from following others "more closely than is reasonable or prudent" under the circumstances. In addition, heavy trucks weighing more than 10,000 pounds must also keep at least 500 feet behind the vehicles in front of them.

However, trucks can realize significant fuel efficiencies through the use of "drafting", in which a group of trucks arrange themselves in such a way as to reduce the aerodynamic drag they experience. This strategy is also common in auto and bicycle racing. The problem is that effective drafting often requires trucks to follow each other more closely than 500 feet.

Fortunately, technology exists that allows trucks to do this safely in a process called "platooning". Equipped with the proper communications and radar technology, computers in each truck coordinate with each other to simultaneously accelerate or decelerate, maintaining the proper distance for drafting. The direct link among trucks results in faster reaction times when faced with obstacles than unconnected drivers can achieve. In addition, leading platooning providers require trucks to be equipped with safety features such as radar-based collision avoidance systems, automatic emergency braking, and air disc brakes. At the same time, platooning technology is not self-driving or autonomous technology. Drivers will continue to have ultimate control over their individual vehicles, including steering.

Assembly Bill 824 and Senate Bill 695 create an exception to Wisconsin's tailgating laws by allowing trucks that travel in platoons to follow each other more closely than 500 feet, although the truck in front would still be subject to the 500-foot minimum. Several states currently allow platooning, and this legislation will help reduce fuel usage, a major portion of shipping costs, benefitting both businesses and consumers and allowing Wisconsin's freight companies to remain competitive with our neighbors.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.