



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

JESSE JAMES

October 21th, 2021

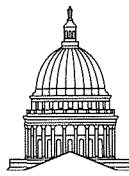
Representative Jesse James' Testimony in Support of AB 405

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and other committee members for holding this hearing on our 9/11 legislation. This legislation adds September 11th to the list of special observance days that apply to general school operations. I did not know there were 21 other special observance days until a school official inquired about adding September 11 to this list.

It is hard for me to think we are approaching two decades since the worst terrorist attack on US soil took place. The 9/11 terrorist attacks killed 2,977 people and injured thousands at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Commemorative events are held at all three sites on the anniversary of the attacks. I remember exactly where I was on September 11, 2001. I was exactly five months into my law enforcement career. I was called into the Village of Elmwood for extra patrol and protection. I remember coming into work and seeing the cars lined up from all directions as they waited for gas, filling up their tanks, gas cans, etc. People were on edge, asking me questions about attacks, and what they should do. Some thought we were going to war, others thought it was the end of the world. It was a scary time for all of us.

According to this proposal, it will be up to each school and district as to how they choose to remember the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. I looked online at the 9/11memorial.org website. I am hoping this would be a resource for those teachers who would want to incorporate this special observance day into their curriculum. I found a number of lesson plans on this site for grades 3-12 that address the 9/11 attacks, their ongoing repercussions, and the history of the World Trade Center. Resources like this will hopefully make this an easy addition for teachers.

It is not the tragedy of September 11, 2001 that we must remember, but the feeling of unity we felt on September 12, 2001. We will not forget! Thank you for this hearing and I look forward to pushing this legislation forward.



JULIAN BRADLEY
WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Assembly Committee on Education
Thursday, October 21, 2021

Assembly Bill 405

Chairman Thiesfeldt and committee members,

Thank you for scheduling this hearing. Shortly after Representative James approached my office about this bill, I was struck by the fact that while the interns in my office were alive 20 years ago, they were too young to have any memory of the devastating attacks committed by terrorists on 9/11. More importantly, they also have no memories of the heroic efforts of our fellow Americans who ran to the wreckage and destruction to come to the aid of those in need. Furthermore, we are now far enough removed from 9/11 that no K-12 students were alive 20 years ago on that terrible day.

Wisconsin currently has twenty-one special observance days, starting with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 15 through Veterans Day on November 11 each year. These days make a variety of historic events and figures more accessible to students throughout our state and the bravery of firefighters and police officers on 9/11 merits inclusion among these days. It is our collective memory and experience that creates much of our shared identity as a nation, and I know highlighting the events of 9/11 and the heroic response would be a valuable addition for students in Wisconsin.

As 9/11 and its seismic effects are still felt today and have a lasting impact on world affairs, it is imperative that we take time to reflect and teach Wisconsin students what happened.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions from committee members.

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 405

October 21, 2021

Heidi Eliopoulos
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Good morning and thank you. It is an honor to have the opportunity to provide testimony to you in support of Assembly Bill 405. I am the Superintendent of the School District of Altoona and am starting my 21st year in education. I both reside and work in the districts of Representative Jesse James and Senator Kathy Bernier.

On September 11th, 2001, we lost 2751 fellow Americans in the most devastating attack on American soil in modern history. It was not just an attack on our buildings, but an attack on our freedom, our confidence, and our sense of security. September 11th was a day of great loss and devastation. And on September 12th, we vowed solemnly and earnestly that we would never forget.

Like you, I haven't forgotten. I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing on the morning of September 11th, 2001. I was an English teacher at Eau Claire North High School. I remember that we strategically left the TVs on in the hallways but did not allow them in classrooms. I remember that one of my students had a brother who worked at the World Trade Center. I remember that one of my colleagues had a father who worked at the Pentagon. I remember that class after class, I stood up in front of my freshman students to assure them that we didn't have to be afraid and that we were safe. I also remember that, deep down inside, I wasn't sure if that was true. No one was. I remember feeling both pride and fear when I saw soot-covered firefighters and police officers carrying citizens out to safety. I remember that following Friday night, at my brother's football game, the home team and the visiting team walked onto the field together, alternating team members so that their jerseys were red, blue, red, blue, red, blue. The players joined hands and walked on as one team in a sign of solidarity as a community member sang "God Bless the USA." I remember that Sunday, the pews in my church were packed fuller than Christmas Eve, fuller than Easter. I remember the ache of hearing the long list of names of those lost and mourning for strangers.

As Americans, as Wisconsinites, as local community members, we worked through the feelings of shock, grief, and anger of September 11th and we promised that we would never forget. I wonder. Have we kept our promise? Are we still the patriots we were on September 12th? Do we embrace our fellow humankind like we did on September 12th? Do we love and help our neighbors like we did on September 12th? Do we support our first responders and military like we did on September 12th? Do we cherish our loved ones like we did on September 12th?

The children in our schools today don't have our memories of September 11th because they weren't born yet. Adding September 11th to the collection of required school observance days, taking its place among days like US Constitution Day, Leif Erickson Day, and American Creed Day, is a simple way that we can keep the promise we made to never forget. The 21 required school observance days aren't huge momentous productions. They might be a simple acknowledgement read in the morning announcements along with student birthdays, the lunch menu, and the Pledge of Allegiance. So, how much impact can this simple observance have on helping us remember September 11th? I would say

quite a bit, since I might be one of the only people you meet who can tell you off the top of my head that Mildred Fish Harnack was a spy and the only American civilian killed by a direct order of Adolph Hilter. I know this because I hear this announced every year on September 16th, which was also her birthday.

Adding September 11th as the 22nd school observance day in Wisconsin will create an opportunity for systematic remembrance of that day in our history and will help us keep our promise that we will never forget.

I appreciate your consideration of this testimony as a school leader, but also as the proud wife of a law enforcement officer, the proud sister of a law enforcement officer, and the proud daughter of a professional firefighter.

Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the committee, I'm Victoria Casola, and although I am Representative James' research assistant, I'm here on my own accord during my lunch break to speak to why this legislation is important to me personally. Although you probably cannot tell from my accent, I was originally born in New York, and my father served as an NYPD officer for 20 years. When Representative James originally introduced this bill, I knew that this was going to be one of the most special pieces of legislation I was going to be dealing with, and when the bill was scheduled for this hearing, we asked my father to provide some words as to why he felt the legacy of September 11th should continue to be observed in our schools. My father, Anthony, sent the following:

"Good morning (afternoon): I would like to take a moment to thank Representative Jesse James for allowing my brief words into the record. When I was asked by my daughter to write down a few words about why we should never forget 9/11, I struggled. Not only is it a difficult subject to talk about, but I felt that I had no right to do so. My role on that day was very limited, as I had already completed my midnight to 8 am shift. By the time I made it back to my command after we were recalled, my unit was assigned to morgue duty, several miles north of Ground Zero. I was feeling useless. How selfish would that be? I wanted to be down there with my brothers and sisters trying to rescue any survivors. I wanted to be where the action was rather than performing the important duty of identifying the remains of loved ones. It then sort of hit me. Why we should remember 9/11 and I thought I would just share with you what I share with everyone else who asks me about that day:

"New York City Firefighters are true heroes! Those firefighters walked up the stairs of those Towers knowing full well that most of them, if not all of them, were not coming back down. And each one, without hesitation, when told that there were people up in those buildings that needed their help and the firefighters needed to get to them, their only reply would be, yes sir! And I would bet my pension that if you asked each one to do it again if they could, the answer would be the same, yes sir!"

It is that selflessness and that of police officers, EMT's and every other nameless, faceless citizen who ran to the trouble to help instead of running way, it is these acts of courage and caring that demands our respect and that we remember 9/11. On the wall of my office at work, there hangs the pictures of the 23 members of the NYPD who heroically lost their lives on 9/11. Each morning, before I take my seat, I take a moment to acknowledge their sacrifice with a salute. I will always remember them. We must never forget the thousands of lives lost and the tens of thousands of lives shattered on 9/11 and also must remember to be vigilant as we remain vulnerable. Thank you.

Police Officer Anthony Casola, NYPD, Retired."

I won't speak much more on the impact that day had not only my family, but countless others. However, I do want to highlight how important I believe it is for future generations to remember this day and how the best way to do that is through our schools. When I originally asked my dad to write this, he told me that one of his first memories of that day was that it was my first day of preschool. My brother was not even a year old at this point either. Most kids in our schools today were not even alive in 2001. This bill is an opportunity for us to carry on the legacy of those who gave their lives that day, and although nothing might give them the proper justice they deserve for their actions, we can at least try. I want to thank my father for allowing me to share his words on his behalf and thank you all as well.

Victoria Casola