



DALE KOOYENGA
STATE SENATOR · 5TH DISTRICT

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January 18, 2022

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Education

FR: Senator Dale Kooyenga

RE: Support for SB 695 – the number of independent charter schools authorized by the College of Menominee Nation or the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College.

Thank you for holding a hearing on SB 695. This legislation lifts the cap on the number of independent charter schools a tribal college may authorize.

Under current law tribal colleges are the only authorizers for independent charter schools that are capped at the number of schools they may authorize. There are several entities that are authorized to establish and operate a charter school – such as the Office of Educational Opportunity in the UW System, a technical college district board, the county executive of Waukesha County, the College of Menominee Nation, and the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa community college. Tribal colleges are only allowed to authorize a maximum of six charter schools between the only two tribal colleges in Wisconsin.

This legislation would eliminate the arbitrary cap on the number of schools that a tribal college is allowed to authorize and bring parity to the authorizing bodies for independent charter schools.

Thank you for hearing SB 695. I respectfully ask for your support.



DAVID STEFFEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 4TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

January 18, 2021

Chairman Thiesfeldt and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding a public hearing on SB 695 relating to eliminating the cap on the number of charter schools authorized by a tribal college.

Under current law, multiple entities are permitted to establish and operate charter schools. Out of all of the authorized entities, only tribal colleges are restricted to a specific number of schools. This legislation will lift the cap on the number of independent charter schools a tribal college may authorize. Current law allows tribal colleges to authorize a maximum of six charter schools between the only two tribal colleges in Wisconsin, the College of Menominee Nation and the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College.

The Office of Educational Opportunity in the UW System, a technical college district board, and the county executive of Waukesha County currently are able to establish and operate charter schools, but do not face the same numerical restrictions. Most authorizers are restricted by geographical boundaries.

This legislation aims to eliminate the arbitrary cap on the number of schools that a tribal college is allowed to authorize, and creates parity between tribal colleges and other authorizers of charter schools in addition to expanding school choice and educational opportunity across Wisconsin.

I appreciate your consideration of this bill and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Wisconsin State Senate
Committee on Education
Public Hearing
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College
Testimony
Delivered by College President Dr. Russell Swagger
January 18, 2022

Chairwoman Darling and Committee Members,

Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College (LCOOC) strongly supports the passage of Senate Bill 695 (2021) in its entirety.

LCOOC originally decided to exercise its legal right to authorize its first charter school within the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Tribal Nation. College Officials were approached by the prospective charter school officials who were writing a grant to the U.S. Department of Education. Their team needed to show they would have an independent charter school authorizer chartering them to qualify for the grant funds.

During the formation of the Charter Authorizing Board and Administrative Organization, LCOOC performed its due diligence by meeting with another tribal college that had been chartering schools for a considerable amount of time. College Officials also met with Officials from the College of the Menominee Nation because they too may legally authorize charter schools. Additionally, Board and Staff Members from the College attended a National Charter School Conference and worked closely with the Wisconsin Resource Center for Charter Schools and the Wisconsin DPI. The College is grateful to each of them. The College received strong support in moving forward with this new educational tool enabling it to positively impact other communities while achieving the College Mission of educating others about Ojibwe People. Policies and application materials were created along with the development of the Charter School Authorizing Board, separate from the College's Board of Regents. This Board meets monthly to review the performance and progress of its current charter schools and to discuss potential applicants.

Simultaneously, the College Charter Authorizing Board reviewed several or more applications from other prospective charter schools almost immediately once word of our authorizing status and beginning work with charter schools was announced. The Board of Regents received interest from non-tribal schools that were off-reservation. The Charter Authorizing Board was interested in authorizing non-tribal schools off-reservation because the College believed they could advance their mission of teaching Ojibwe language, history, and culture.

The Board of Regents met with the Wisconsin Resource Center for Charter Schools leadership and immediately went to work on an application and a matrix to be used by applicants in the process. The matrix is important because it asks non-Indian schools off-reservation to explain and commit to the teaching of Native American studies with an emphasis on Ojibwe language, history, and culture. The Charter Authorizing Board made the teaching of this Native American component a contract requirement for charter schools under their authorization.

Since these early days, the College has chartered one Native American on-reservation school and one non-Native American school off-reservation. The College has and continues to receive applications from

non-Native American off-reservation schools. To date, the College is not in the process of reviewing any new applications. Nor is the College in the process of authorizing any additional schools.

LCOOC has operated knowing it has a cap of 3 schools that it can charter and that the College of Menominee Nation can charter the remaining 3 schools for a total of 6 between the only two tribal colleges in the State of Wisconsin.

LCOOC is in full support of eliminating the limit on the total number of charter schools that may be authorized by both Wisconsin Tribal Colleges. The limit causes the two colleges to turn potential applicants away, the two colleges may experience a barrier to growth when they reach their limit, and frankly, the two colleges are placed in a position that is awkward and can cause tension between the two colleges as they decide between themselves how to split the six school limit. Our two colleges maintain very strong relations. This limit could however be a divisive issue for us to contend with if left as is with a total cap of 6 between the two of us.

The LCOOC Officials are requesting full authority to authorize an unlimited number of charter schools. There should be clarification that discriminatory or prejudice language be kept out of any bill that suggests the two colleges should not operate outside of reservation boundaries. LCOOC is requesting full parity with all other Wisconsin Independent Charter School Authorizers. Tribal Colleges students live in many off-reservation communities throughout the State of Wisconsin. Additionally, tribal colleges serve many non-Indian people living off-reservation. We currently serve Native American and non-Native American students in public schools and off-reservation communities. Any restriction, boundaries, or geographic limitations aimed at tribal college would not be parity.

Let it be known too that LCOOC does not speak for the College of the Menominee Nation. Officials from there did not provide input on this testimony.

At this point, LCOOC does not have plans to grow tremendously in terms of the number of charter schools it authorizes. The College is not in this for the money either. The College is in this because it has been granted legal authority to do so. The College chooses to live out its Mission which in part is to "Advance Ojibwe language, history, and culture." We believe we can reach many more people using the curriculum required of our authorized charter schools to reduce gaps in understanding and build stronger communities of learners.

*** The College changed its name and is no longer known as Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College. Rather, the College is now known as Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College.**