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ASSEMBLY 1064

TESTIMONY OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT JOHNSON

Chairperson Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill 1064.

This bill, in cooperation with the UW-System, funds the Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue (WICCD).

As members of this committee are aware, the University of Wisconsin System conducted a free speech survey in late 2022. The results of that survey were troubling. Students' free speech experience differed dramatically depending on their political beliefs. The survey showed that more than 64% of conservative students felt pressured to stifle their speech on campus or conform their speech to what their professor desired. On the other hand, only 20% of liberal students felt such pressure.

The survey resulted in hearings around the state and the free-speech legislation that is currently moving through the Legislature.

In conjunction with that Free Speech Survey, the University of Wisconsin System created the Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue (WICCD). The mission of WICCD is to provide resources, opportunities, and support for:

1. Encouraging viewpoint diversity,
2. Promoting freedom of expression,
3. Protecting academic freedom, and
4. Advancing civic participation within our universities and our communities.

Utilizing the funding, WICCD has a number of priorities it would like to accomplish in the upcoming year, including:

1. Hiring a full-time executive director and establishing a Board of Advisors,
2. Appointing university liaisons, and establishing relationships with university and non-university partners
3. Setting up a web site, and
4. Organizing 2024 programming and workshops.

The thing is, right now WICCD doesn't have enough money to accomplish its mission and its priorities. In fact, right now WICCD doesn't have enough money to hire a full time director.

This bill would remedy that by providing a \$500,000 annual appropriation that would be matched by the UW-System.

As the Free Speech Survey shows, now – more than ever – we need an organization like WICCD that promotes free speech, viewpoint diversity and civil dialogue between people.

Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have, but Professor Tim Sheill will be testifying next, and he can help address any particular questions you may have.



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE SENATOR • 19TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara
February 6, 2024

Thank you, committee members for allowing me to testify today on Assembly Bill 1064, which provides an appropriation to fund the University of Wisconsin System's Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue.

Every day, we are bombarded with examples of how divided we are politically in the news and on social media. This blanket of negativity surrounding politics has caused many people to either conceal their personal views or express them only in echo chambers where they are certain to find agreement. Universities are not immune from this trend, which is particularly concerning because they serve as the incubator for our most actively engaged citizens. Right now, it's critically important that we reverse these trends and encourage our students to open up and engage with their peers and mentors about politics.

The Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue was created by the UW System president in 2022. The institute coordinates academic centers across UW System focusing on the Constitution and public affairs in order to elevate, enhance, and promote programming and research. One example of such a program is "It's Just Coffee" at UW-Madison through which students of differing backgrounds discuss difficult topics—politics, religion, economics—in a respectful, civil way within a non-threatening environment. The program demonstrates that with the necessary support, students become willing and eager to have meaningful, one-on-one conversations with people with whom they might disagree.

The work of this institute is deeply linked to the core mission of UW System and deserves bipartisan recognition by the legislature. More importantly, this initiative is more than worthy of investment by state taxpayers, as it will directly result in a stronger democracy for us all. The \$500,000 annual appropriation will fully fund the institute's operations and ensure the next generation of students graduate from our universities with the tools and knowledge they need to be fully engaged citizens.



Shiell testimony on AB 1064, 2.6.2024, Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

Good morning,

I am Dr. Tim Shiell. I retired in 2023 after 30 plus years as a professor of philosophy at UW-Stout, founding and directing the university's Center for Applied Ethics as well as the Menard Center for the Study of Institutions and Innovation. I have been re-hired on a part-time basis to continue my work directing Stout's Menard Center and to serve as Interim Director of the Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue, commonly known by its acronym WICCD (in a good way). I am here to testify in support of AB 1064.

The WICCD initiative was announced by UW President Jay Rothman in November 2022 in conjunction with several related initiatives. In concluding that announcement, President Rothman emphasized "We know that the threads that weave together the fabric of American society are fraying. We know that distrust in our institutions is increasing. We know that misinformation sows doubt about the truth – and about each other. At the University of Wisconsin System, we will seek to reverse these trends by promoting civil dialogue as a key to informed citizenship. This effort goes hand in glove with our role in providing students the education and training they need to thrive in our economy. If we are successful in moving the needle, we will have a better Wisconsin and be a model for a better nation."

Thus, WICCD is an initiative that will enable the Universities of Wisconsin to add to their national and international reputation for excellence in higher education by promoting citizenship and civil dialogue through a greater understanding of and appreciation for free expression, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity. Challenges to these values have not been as intense since the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The work WICCD is doing is grounded in Regent policy and UW strategic planning. WICCD will be operationalizing the ideals expressed in RPD 4-21—the Board of Regents "Commitment to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression"—as well as UW strategic plan S4: "We will champion the democratic principles of free expression, academic freedom, and civil discourse."

WICCD has already begun its work collaborating with the Universities of Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, Office of General Counsel, Office of Academic Affairs, Office of Compliance and Integrity, and Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging, and will extend that outreach to the thirteen universities of Wisconsin and interested non-academic organizations this spring. My task as Interim Director is to pave the road for a full-time director to put the pedal to the metal next year. We are well on our way to that goal.

To achieve meaningful results, or become a national leader, WICCD requires appropriate funding. A \$250,000 budget was provided by the Universities of Wisconsin this fiscal year and \$500,000 is pledged

for 2024-2025. As valuable as this funding is, it is not enough to achieve meaningful results across a system with thirteen universities with more than 160,000 students and 40,000 employees.

To achieve meaningful results, WICCD will need to support a robust grant program, grants that fund faculty and student research and internships, professional development and curriculum development, public events and activities, and assessment projects. WICCD will need to fund an ideologically diverse set of speakers and panels and organize other events throughout the year that culminate in an annual large scale signature event. WICCD will need to provide educational workshops and trainings that enable participants to better understand and apply principles of free expression and civil dialogue. WICCD will need to be a clearinghouse for resources on best practices, curriculum modules, and much more.

\$500,000 funding from the legislature added to \$500,000 from the Universities of Wisconsin will enable WICCD in the next year to deliver to a powerful combination of programming, services, and resources to promote and protect free expression, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity in the larger context of citizenship and civil dialogue.

It must be noted that if being national leaders is the goal, then WICCD eventually will require more than a million-dollar annual budget. The budget will need to increase to several million per year, including significant input from external gifts and grants.

The bottom line? There a lot of challenges facing Wisconsin universities and communities. There will be disagreements about what the challenges are, what their causes are, what are best steps to move us forward. But we should all agree that progress is most likely if we heed the wisdom of the 1890 Board of Regents report highlighted in the Bascom Hall plaque: "Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found." I never get tired of repeating that wisdom. Sifting and winnowing. An Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue. These are Wisconsin values, not partisan values, and they are far too important for us to sit on the sideline. On Wisconsin. Fund WICCD.