
AMANDA NEDWESKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 61ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

October 26, 2023
Testimony on AB 545

Thank you, Chairman Murphy and committee members for giving Assembly Bill 545 a public hearing today.

Members of a technical college board in Wisconsin are empowered by statute to levy a tax on the full value of the taxable property of the district for the purposes of making capital improvements, acquiring equipment, operating and maintaining the schools of the district, and paying principal and interest on valid bonds or notes. A technical college district board may borrow money and levy taxes to be used for the purchase or construction of buildings and for additions, enlargements and improvements to buildings, and for the acquisition of sites and equipment.

Except for the district board governing the Milwaukee Area Technical College, Wisconsin technical college boards shall be composed of 9 members who are residents of the district, including two employers, two employees, three additional members, one school district administrator, and one elected official who holds a state or local office.

Technical college boards are responsible for the organization, operation, and planning aspects of the institution. Their authority to levy a property tax and/or borrow money for these purposes is powerful. Elected representatives of municipal, public school board, state, and federal governing bodies for Wisconsin must be U.S. citizens. Due to their levying and borrowing authority, this legislation simply requires Wisconsin technical College Board members to be United States citizens, as well.

AB 545 provides an exception for any currently serving Wisconsin Technical College Board members who may not be U.S. citizens. If a non-citizen is serving on a technical college board currently, that member may serve out the remainder of their current term. That member must step down prior to or upon expiration of their current term unless the member has obtained U.S. citizenship along the way.



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

October 26, 2023

Testimony on Assembly Bill 545

Thank you Chairman Murphy and Committee Members for today's hearing on Assembly Bill 545, which specifies that Technical College Board Members must be United States Citizens. This bill comes to me from a technical college board member who is himself an immigrant who became a United States Citizen.

Tech College Boards perform an important service for the districts which they serve. They work with employers, educators, and students to ensure their Technical College is providing the classes, training, and opportunities that are necessary for the success of their district. They also have the authority to levy property taxes just as K-12 school district boards and municipal governing bodies do.

However, there is one significant difference between technical college district boards and other school district boards, and municipal governing bodies. That is that members of those boards are comprised of elected officials. And, Wisconsin law requires all elected officials to be U.S. citizens. There is no such requirement for technical college district board members

This bill creates a standard requirement for all public officials that are able to levy taxes and borrow money on behalf of the public. I believe it only makes sense that these powerful quasi-governmental boards are held to the same standards as every other local official in Wisconsin. I encourage you to support its passage.

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Dear Honorary Representative Nedweski

Due to prior commitments in my local community, I am unable to travel to Madison this Thursday October 26th to testify at the Public hearings in the assembly committee on Colleges and Universities.

It is my understanding that the public hearings will include public comments on Assembly Bill AB545.

Therefore, I request you to kindly accept this email as my testimony in reference to the Assembly Bill AB545.

I wish to express my strong support that the qualifications to be a trustee on Wisconsin Technical College District Boards must include the requirement to be a citizen of the United States.

As members of the Technical College District Board, the Trustees have jurisdiction to impose property taxes on the homeowners in the state of Wisconsin. However, currently in the Affidavit of Qualifications for Wisconsin Technical College District Board Membership (application to be a trustee on Wisconsin Technical College District Board) there is no requirement for the trustee applicants to be a US Citizen.

In my opinion, this is wrong, and totally unacceptable.

As a non-citizen, you are not eligible to vote, nor *even* sign an election nomination petition. So, **how can you have the jurisdiction to impose property taxes on the home owners?**

The application to apply as a board member requires an applicant to sign an affidavit, and get it notarized.

This affidavit is submitted pursuant to chapter 38.08, and 38.10 Wis Stats., and Chapter TCS 2, Wis. Adm. Code. These applicable statutes require an applicant to be a resident of the technical college jurisdiction boundaries, and also be employed by or have business ownership in the technical college jurisdiction areas.

The statutes also list the categories of representation.

However, there is no requirement, at all, to be a US citizen.

The above means a person residing in the US on a temporary H1 work visa, or any foreign national or even an illegal resident residing and working in the technical college jurisdiction area can apply and be appointed to the board of trustees, and hence have subsequent jurisdiction of taxation authority.

As a citizen, and a home owner, I strongly object to any taxation authority by a non US citizen.

Therefore, via this email testimony I urge you all to kindly review the aforementioned statutes and make appropriate revisions.

Please revise to include requirement to be a US citizen.

If for any political reasons, inserting US citizen cannot be done, then at minimum the statutes must include a qualification clause such as an applicant must be an "**eligible voter**", which by default would make a non-US citizen ineligible to apply to a technical college district board.

Please feel free to contact me, should you have any questions, or wish to further discuss the above.

Thank you for your kind considerations.

Sincerely,

Ram Bhatia
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WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE DISTRICT BOARDS ASSOCIATION

October 26, 2023

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

Layla Merrifield, Executive Director, Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association

AB-545 - Technical College Board Membership

Chairman Murphy and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on AB-545. For over a century, Wisconsin's technical college boards have been comprised of employers, employees, elected officials, and others, selected via a competitive, merit-based process by committees of elected local officials serving as the appointment authority. These appointment committees are comprised of either county board chairs, county executives, or school board presidents, and their selections are made in an open and public process.

The appointment committee first conducts a public hearing to consider the overall college district, its demographics, and its unique and ever-evolving workforce needs. Based on this hearing, the committee establishes an annual "plan of representation," to ensure that appointments represent a balance of the geographical areas, populations, and communities within the district. Public notices are published in local media and distributed to key employers and community organizations around the district. Applicants are listed in additional public notices announcing the appointment hearing, to encourage public input. Each candidate must submit a resumé, letter of application, letters of recommendation, and an affidavit of eligibility. Applicants must then appear at the appointment hearing in person to be interviewed by the committee, and members of the public may provide input to the committee during the hearing. Finally, local appointments are reviewed and approved by Wisconsin Technical College System Board.

Each nine-member board must include slots for at least two employers and at least two employees, a local elected official, a K-12 school superintendent, and at-large members (at-large must also be balanced between employers and employees). At MATC-Milwaukee, five business persons are appointed, instead of employers/employees. Further, board members must reside in the college's district and, if the member is an employer representative, that employer must be located within the district.

Wisconsin's technical colleges are known for their transparency and excellent outcomes for graduates:

<https://www.wtcsystem.edu/impact/publications/graduate-outcomes-report/>

This performance directly results from carefully selected governing boards reflective of their local communities, local industries, and local challenges.

I am aware of only one technical college board member who is not a U.S. Citizen. She is a "deferred action for childhood arrivals" (DACA) recipient—the policy that indefinitely delayed deportation of persons who were initially brought to the United States as children, through no fault of their own. DACA provided legal employment authorization for them, but not necessarily a clear pathway to citizenship. This board member is an exceptional person, who first earned a short-term cosmetology credential at a technical college, because she knew that would allow her to earn just enough money to put herself through school and reach her ultimate goal: becoming an engineer. She then earned a two-year engineering degree at the technical college, transferred to the Milwaukee School of Engineering, and graduated. She is now a successful engineer working for a local firm in her community, and she was recently married. She is actively pursuing U.S. Citizenship, and is qualified to become a naturalized

citizen. However, she has been told to expect a 4 to 6 year wait for the federal government to process her application. In the meantime, she has dedicated herself to serving the institution that made it possible to reach her career goals, and she is an outstanding ambassador to the Latino/Hispanic community on behalf of the promise and prosperity that are made possible by an affordable, accessible technical college education. In short, she exemplifies the American Dream, and the incredible opportunity that this country has represented to immigrants from all over the world who are willing to work hard and play by the rules, since its very founding.

I am grateful to the authors for including a provision to allow this board member to complete her term. I also ask for your consideration of the extraordinary circumstances present in this case, and to permit "legal permanent residents," in addition to U.S. Citizens, to serve on technical college district boards. Thank you.