



DATE: January 17, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue

FROM: Universities of Wisconsin Office of Government Relations

RE: Written Testimony in favor of Senate Substitute Amendment 1 to Senate Bill 367

Thank you, Chair Hutton and committee members, for giving the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) an opportunity to provide testimony in favor of Senate Substitute Amendment 1 (SSA1) to Senate Bill 367 (SB 367).

It is often said that there is a place for everyone at the Universities of Wisconsin. A core part of our mission is to ensure accessibility of our campuses for Wisconsin high school students. We are proud of the work we have done to meet that goal. Systemwide, in-state students had an acceptance rate of 94% for the new freshman fall class of 2023. Nine of our four-year campuses had an acceptance rate of 95% or higher for in-state students. UW provides virtually every interested Wisconsin student an opportunity to attend one of our institutions. However, we also want to make sure that our top high school students have an easy and accessible path to admission at our universities.

The UW prides itself as being the home to approximately 161,000 students who are obtaining a world-class education right here in Wisconsin. We want to ensure we recruit and retain Wisconsin's top students. That is why as part of our 2023-28 Strategic Plan, we have a goal of increasing our number of graduates by 10%, from 37,000 degrees conferred to 41,000 by 2028. Also, we have made a strong commitment to increasing enrollment by increasing the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in our universities.

One path we are taking to encourage more top students to attend a UW school and join Wisconsin's workforce upon graduation is by launching a *direct admissions program* that will proactively offer admissions to qualifying high school students based on their high school GPA and academic coursework. In Phase I of this program, 10 UW universities and more than 300 high schools are participating. High school students at participating high schools, who opt-in to the Phase I program, will begin to receive direct admissions offer letters in July 2024 for fall 2025 admission. Also, UW-Green Bay is currently piloting a *direct admissions program* for the 2023-24 academic year. UW-Green Bay's program automatically admits *all* graduates of the local school district to UW-Green Bay. Our intent is that a *direct admissions program* will expand statewide over the next few years. The Universities of Wisconsin is working hard to ensure Wisconsin's top high school graduates are given a spot at one of our campuses.

SSA1 to SB 367 will provide another avenue to encourage Wisconsin's top students to attend UW campuses. We want to thank the authors for working with us on SSA1 which addressed many of our concerns with the original bill and Assembly substitute amendment. With the adoption of SSA1, this

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legislation now requires the UWs to establish a guaranteed admissions program for Wisconsin applicants in the top 5% and 10% of their high school senior class. The Universities of Wisconsin supports this substitute amendment because it will help encourage the top students in Wisconsin to remain in-state for their postsecondary education, and will encourage more of these students to remain here after graduation. We want to make the pathway to our campuses easier and more accessible for Wisconsin's top students. Establishing this guaranteed admission program will help make that a reality and encourage more of Wisconsin's best and brightest students to remain in our state.

Again, thank you for giving the UWs an opportunity to submit testimony today.



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# RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

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STATE SENATOR • 19<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue  
Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara  
January 17, 2024*

Chairman Hutton and members of the Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue, thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 367, an important piece of legislation that will restore fairness and transparency to Wisconsin's public college admissions.

Our public colleges and universities were built and are maintained with billions of dollars from Wisconsin taxpayers and tuition paying families. In return, the people of our state have been greeted with rejection letters and walls of secrecy hiding why perfectly qualified students are being turned away, often to attend school in another state and leave Wisconsin forever. This is not a good return on our investment. This is not the commitment to openness and understanding that we expect from institutions of higher learning. In short, this is a failure of colleges and universities to uphold their mission.

Senate Bill 367 provides a simple fix to do what our public colleges and universities should already be doing: admit the best and brightest students in a transparent way. Our bill sets clear expectations for students to meet in order to gain admission to the public school of their choice. Any student ranked in the top of their class, as detailed in the bill, is guaranteed a seat at a public college or university of their choice in Wisconsin.

It's impossible to work toward a goal that no one knows about except an anonymous admissions officer. Right now, hardworking families and students across Wisconsin are scrambling to meet these invisible benchmarks. That's not democratic. That's not fair. Wisconsin families deserve better and our bill does just that.

I thank the Universities of Wisconsin for engaging on this issue and Senate Substitute Amendment 1 reflects the language that was agreed to. This bill in front of you is an important step in the right direction as we continue discussions around our admissions processes.



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**January 17, 2024**

## **Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue**

### **Testimony for Senate Bill 367**

### **Guaranteeing admission to University of Wisconsin System institutions and requiring schools to prepare class rankings for certain pupils.**

#### **"Retaining Wisconsin's Best & Brightest"**

Good afternoon and thank you Mr. Chairman and Committee for providing us an opportunity to address this issue with the Committee today. I am joined by co-author Sen. Rachel Cabral-Guevara, and other speakers who are impacted by this bill in a variety of ways.

We are pleased to introduce this bill to the Wisconsin Legislature to ensure that our "best and brightest High School graduates" will be admitted to the UW System School or Technical College of their choice right here in Wisconsin.

A number of our students, families, High School Principals, and School Administrators have shared disappointing reports of how a number of our top-performing High School graduates – those who would rank at the top of their classes - cannot gain admission to one of our UW System schools.

This rejection is the result of the undisclosed UW System formula that can leave Wisconsin's best and brightest out of our schools. The Chairman has requested this formula in the past and the UW provided a redacted response that avoided answering the question as to how the UW System determines who qualifies for admission and on what terms. This makes no sense.

The bottom line is that we are losing too many of our "best and brightest" High School graduates to neighboring colleges and universities. Is this not a form of institutionalized brain drain? Our UW campuses are rightfully proud of the post-graduate retention rate for out-of-state college graduates who choose to remain in Wisconsin after graduation.

This is also true of those Wisconsin students who end up in an out-of-state college. Once that student leaves Wisconsin for another state, there is an increased likelihood that when they graduate from college, they will not return to Wisconsin, where they would become long-term contributing members of our communities.

We do not have to watch idly by as the future leaders of our state leave and never return. SB 367 ensures that the top five percent of students Wisconsin has to offer will be guaranteed a seat at a University of Wisconsin or Wisconsin Technical College campus of their choice.

The purpose of this bill is to provide a pathway for guaranteed admission for the "Top Five Percent" of our high school scholastic performers to UW-Madison and "Top Ten Percent" to all other UW System schools. The highlights include:

- Under this bill, Boards for public schools, choice schools, private schools, homeschoolers, and tribal schools will establish a method for ranking pupils based on ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ONLY. Considerations will include the pupil's Grade Point Average, SAT or ACT exam scores, course work, and other measures of academic achievement or scholastic merit to determine who qualifies for the Top 5% and Top 10% of graduates. There will be no further qualifiers allowed in this scholastic determination.
- For UW System institutions, the program admission benefit applies only to applicants as first-year undergraduate students. The UW System schools will be required to grant admission to these students.

Our goal is to increase our capture rate of Wisconsin's "best and brightest" for our colleges and universities that later make Wisconsin their long-term home after receiving their degree from one of our UW or Tech Schools. When that happens all of Wisconsin wins.



**Senate Committee on Universities & Revenue**  
2023 Senate Bill 367

January 17, 2024

*Guaranteed admission to University of Wisconsin institutions*

Chairman Hutton and the Senate Committee on Universities & Revenue:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 367, pending passage of Senate Substitute Amendment 1, related to guaranteed admission to University of Wisconsin institutions. The University of Wisconsin-Madison shares the goal of the authors in ensuring that the best and brightest students in Wisconsin know they have a place at our public institutions of higher education.

UW-Madison employs a holistic admissions process that takes into consideration several different criteria when reviewing applications. First and foremost, admissions counselors are looking for academic excellence reflected through coursework and grades. Beyond academics, the Admissions team looks for qualities such as leadership, concern for others and the community, achievement in the arts and athletics, and potential for contribution to the UW-Madison community. UW-Madison Office of Admissions & Recruitment prides itself on establishing relationships with high schools across Wisconsin and beyond. The goal is to account for the wide variety of educational opportunities across the state and the desire to capture wide representation from talented and impressive graduates from all 72 Wisconsin counties.

During the public hearing on this proposal in the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities, representatives from UW-Madison detailed their concerns with the bill as drafted. These concerns included the use of GPA and ACT/SAT score to determine class rank in a high school landscape that varies greatly on use of class rank. Additional concerns included the sole use of ACT/SAT scores to determine admission decisions for homeschooled students and the lack of requirement for a student to have taken the necessary minimum range of high school courses outlined in the existing Board of Regents policy.

We would like to thank the bill authors and other legislative leaders for their engagement in the discussion of how to make this a clear and workable process for both Wisconsin families and universities. Assuming the relevant changes are made to the legislation, UW-Madison is supportive of a proposal that would guarantee admission for the top 5% of Wisconsin residents attending high school in

Wisconsin, including public, private, charter, and parochial schools in a graduating class of 15 or more students. Ranking would be determined solely on GPA at the conclusion of a student's junior year. Homeschooled students or students attending a completely virtual school would be granted automatic admission to UW-Madison if they scored in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the ACT in one sitting. Those students who are National Merit Finalists would also be granted automatic admission.

The changes would also include a requirement that students complete any necessary application for admission during their senior year, and for UW-Madison, this would need to be submitted during the early application period. An amended bill would also need to include a requirement that the student complete the necessary range of high school courses for admission per Board of Regent policy. Any academic misconduct or significantly declining grades may be cause for revoking admission. Any guaranteed admission policy will not provide guaranteed admission to a specific school and/or program.

Again, UW-Madison shares the goal of the authors and others to ensure that the best and brightest Wisconsin students can attend their flagship campus. We appreciate the willingness of the authors and others to engage in productive discussion to make helpful changes to the proposal. We believe that the bill, with the changes noted above, would achieve that goal and would be workable for our university.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact this legislation would have on UW-Madison. If you have questions, please reach out to UW-Madison Senior Director of State Relations Crystal Potts ([crystal.potts@wisc.edu](mailto:crystal.potts@wisc.edu); 608-265-4105).