

## *Testimony before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety*

Senator André Jacque

November 2, 2023

Chairman Wanggaard and Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 558, the Preserve Our Wisconsin Legacy Act.

Under current law, it is a Class I felony to damage or graffiti certain vehicles, highways, common carrier property, grand juror property, and state-owned historical property. This bill makes it a Class I felony to damage or graffiti any structure, plaque, statue, painting, or other monument of commemorative or historical significance that is on public property or is maintained by the state or any county or municipality.

We all remember the destruction of two monuments on the Wisconsin State Capitol grounds during protests three summers ago:

The Han Christian Heg statue, which honors a hero who immigrated to our Country and became well known for his anti-slavery political views, as well as raising an entire regiment of Norwegian immigrants to fight for the Union in the Civil War; and

The Forward statue is a replica that was erected in 1996 during the celebration of the 76th anniversary of the women's suffrage movement. In 1919, Wisconsin was the first state to ratify the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. Wisconsin women were largely responsible for both the funding of the original statue and the funding for the replica that stood outside the Wisconsin Capitol.

According to the Chair of the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Memorial on the Capitol Square, it has been vandalized at least a half dozen times, including in 2020 with a sledgehammer, requiring significant repair and replacement.

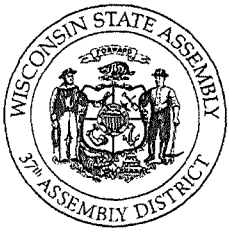
These shrines, along with other memorials and monuments across the State, serve as important reminders of our shared history. They tell the story of Wisconsin and who we are as a people and, as such, should be protected and honored as records of the past that provide important lessons for the present.

A license to damage – or destroy – these historic public assets through civil unrest is a license to undo the common ties that bind us together as citizens of Wisconsin.

According to the Wisconsin Professional Police Association's 2021 statewide survey, 87% of the public agrees that there should be stronger penalties for people that destroy property during protests.

This proposal is also a common sense extension of penalties already in place for damage to church properties and cemeteries.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 558.



# WILLIAM PENTERMAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 37<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 237-9137  
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0037  
Rep.Penterman@legis.wisconsin.gov

P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

**November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023**

**Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety**

**Testimony from Rep. William Penterman in favor of SB 558**

Chairman Wanggaard and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 558, relating to damage or graffiti to certain historical property and providing a penalty.

Under current law, it is a Class I felony to damage or graffiti certain vehicles, highways, common carrier property, grand juror property, and state-owned historical property. SB 558 makes it a Class I felony to damage or graffiti any structure, plaque, statue, painting, or other monument of commemorative or historical significance that is on public property or is maintained by the state, county or municipality.

During the 2020 riots in Madison, several historical monuments around the State Capitol, including Lady Forward and Civil War hero Colonel Hans Heg were destroyed. Lady Forward is a symbol of our state and Hans Heg was a greatly respected abolitionist. Those statutes are more than just stone and metal – they represent the valor of Wisconsinites. They have since been restored, however they should never have been damaged. There should not be a license to destroy public property and to cause damage through civil unrest.

According to the Wisconsin Professional Police Association's 2021 statewide survey, 87% of the public agrees that there should be stronger penalties for people that destroy property during protests.

This proposal is a common sense extension of penalties already in place for damage to church properties and cemeteries.

Thank you again for your time and consideration of SB 558. I hope you will join Senator Jacque and me in supporting this legislation.