



May 1st, 2025

Representative Kitchens, Chair
Representative Goeben, Vice-chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Education

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 210

Relating to: changes to amount of, and criteria for designating recipients of, academic excellence higher education scholarships.

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Assembly Bill 210.

Firstly, I want to thank the bill authors for their communication and collaboration on this bill. They reached out to UW-Madison early in the process to gather feedback, and they have been very receptive to our input at the various stages of drafting this proposal.

As the state's public flagship institution, the University of Wisconsin – Madison strives to provide a world-class education that betters the lives of all citizens across the state. The institution has a strong commitment to educating the next generation of Wisconsinites, with recognition to those in underserved and underrepresented communities, like the students from rural areas that this bill is seeking to support.

In 2023, UW-Madison joined the Small Town and Rural Students (STARS) College Network to create new pathways for students who might not otherwise recognize the full range of education options available to them. This initiative led to the creation of College for Rural Wisconsin on campus, which works to increase college access for rural, farm, and small-town students.

UW-Madison is also working to reduce financial barriers for prospective students. The university was able to increase the percentage of students graduating without debt from 47.6% to 65.5% between 2014 and 2023 through programs like Bucky's Tuition Promise, Bucky's Pell Pathway, and the Badger Promise. These efforts resulted in UW-Madison being named a "Best Value College" last year by the Princeton Review. However, the institution recognizes that affordability is still a major issue facing many students across the state.

The Academic Excellence Scholarship Program and UW-Madison share the goal of increasing access to education. The program provides \$2,250 per year for four years to students with the highest grade point average in each public and private high school throughout the state who

agree to stay in-state for college. Funding for the scholarship is 50/50 through the state and matched by the institution. During the 2023-2024 academic year, there were 811 freshman scholarships available and 730 were claimed. UW-Madison had 348 freshman scholars as students and a total of 1,417 students claiming the scholarship over four years. Madison spent approximately \$1.4 million on these scholarships.

High schools are separated into categories based on their size, and some schools are permitted to nominate more than one student for the scholarship. For example, schools with more than 80 but less than 500 pupils can only nominate one student, and schools with at least 500 but less than 1,000 pupils can nominate two students. However, schools with less than 80 students can nominate one student, but all those students from all those schools are pooled together into one group from which 10 are selected for the scholarship. Plainly stated, while all other nominees are guaranteed a scholarship, those students from the smallest schools in the state are not.

Assembly Bill 210 allows all qualifying students from high schools with less than 80 pupils to receive a scholarship under the program. According to a fiscal estimate, the Higher Educational Aids Board is estimating an increase of 52 students claiming the scholarship each year, totaling 208 additional students after the adjustment is fully implemented. This would add an additional cost of \$234,000 to institutions. UW-Madison expects to bear most of the financial burden of this change in eligibility for the program given that all scholarship recipients are now guaranteed admissions to the university under 2023 Wisconsin Act 95.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on Assembly Bill 210. If you have questions, please reach out to Crystal Potts or Mitch Goettl (crystal.potts@wisc.edu; goettl@wisc.edu).