Chairman Swearingen and members of the Assembly Committee on State Affairs:

My name is Helen Faith, and I am the Director of the Office of Financial Aid at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. At UW-Madison, I am responsible for overseeing the office that advises students on their financial aid options, administers university aid programs including Bucky’s Tuition Promise and Bucky’s Pell Pathway, and provides emergency and basic needs support to students at the university. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 381 which makes changes to the Wisconsin grant and updates other financial aid provisions in state law.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison strives to make higher education affordable for all students. One way we do this is by providing financial aid to those who demonstrate a need in order to attend college. Financial aid includes scholarships, grants, other gift aid, work programs, and federal student loans. Along with our colleagues in WAICU and the Wisconsin Technical College System, UW-Madison and the rest of the UW System campus financial aid directors urge passage of Assembly Bill 381, which makes changes to update financial aid provisions in state statute to align with recent changes made in federal law.

In December of 2020, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Simplification Act of 2020 was signed into law. The bipartisan measure made several changes to laws regulating federal financial aid. The provisions of Assembly Bill 381 propose three changes:

1. The U.S. Department of Education previously used “Estimate Family Contribution” (EFC) as methodology to calculate a student’s financial need. This was changed to “Student Aid Index” (SAI). We request our state statutes be updated to reflect this change.

2. The FAFSA Simplification Act removed the requirement that a student confirm their Selective Service registration on the FAFSA application. Though the federal government still requires males 18 and older to register with the Selective Service, this data is no longer collected by the Department of Education or required to confirm registration to receive federal student aid. We
request that our state statutes be updated to reflect this change.

3. A number of changes to the Wisconsin Grant would benefit students and assist in the streamlining of the financial aid award process. First, adjust Wisconsin Grants lifetime eligibility to align with the Federal Pell Grant: the Federal Pell Grant has an eligibility limit of six years or 12 semesters, prorated based on enrollment of the student, and allows students to be enrolled less than half-time to receive funding. The Wisconsin Grant currently caps eligibility at 10 semesters, regardless of the number of credits taken, and prohibits students who are enrolled less than half-time to receive a grant. This puts nontraditional students at a disadvantage. Second, eliminate outdated formula components currently in state statute to allow for a consistent award process. Finally, remove Wisconsin Grant maximum award dollar amount from state statutes: the statutory cap of $3,150 no longer meets the intent of the program, which is to cover half of tuition costs for students eligible for the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact that the legislation would have on UW-Madison. Questions can be directed to UW-Madison Senior Director of State Relations Crystal Potts (crystal.potts@wisc.edu; 608-265-4105).