WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

**Senate Committee on Universities & Technical Colleges**

2025 Senate Bill 399

*University of Wisconsin System resident undergraduate tuition and fees*

October 15, 2025

Chair Hutton and Members of the Senate Committee on Universities & Technical Colleges:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 399, relating to University of Wisconsin System resident undergraduate tuition and fees. UW-Madison opposes the passage of Senate Bill 399 for the reasons discussed below.

As Wisconsin's flagship campus, UW-Madison is committed to higher education access and affordability. Two-thirds of UW-Madison undergraduates earn their degree without student debt. For those that graduate with debt, the student loan default rate is less than 1%, compared to the national average of over 10%. This tells us that UW-Madison students are well prepared for the workforce and can get jobs and start careers that allow them to pay back their student loans.

After a ten-year tuition freeze, tuition-setting authority for in-state undergraduate tuition was returned to the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents as part of the 2021-23 Biennial Budget. Modest and predictable tuition increases are necessary for several reasons. They support increases in the costs of goods and services, allow us to expand financial aid to students and families with demonstrated need, and ensure we remain competitive in retaining and recruiting world class faculty, among other things. For the UW employee pay plan, the state provides 70%, and UW System campuses are expected to contribute 30%. Tuition increases proposed take into account campus contributions to employee compensation. As we have seen from unprecedented levels of inflation and supply chain challenges, modest tuition increases are needed now more than ever to keep up with rising costs.

UW-Madison also offers millions of dollars of financial aid to Wisconsin residents each year. Our preeminent tuition assistance programs, Bucky's Tuition Promise and Bucky's Pell Pathway, ensure a tuition free four-year college education for all Wisconsin residents who are admitted to UW-Madison with a family income of less than $65,000. Since the inception of the program, thousands of UW-Madison students have benefited from Bucky's Tuition Promise and hail from all 72 counties across Wisconsin. Currently, one out of five UW-Madison students is a recipient of Bucky's Tuition Promise or Bucky's Pell Pathway. More than half are first generation college students.

Senate Bill 399 would prohibit undergraduate in-state tuition and segregated fees from being increased beyond the rate of inflation. UW-Madison's in-state undergraduate tuition was frozen for ten years. At the same time, tuition at Big 10 schools in other midwestern states increased between 5.3% and 25.1%, as demonstrated by the attached slide. UW-Madison should not be the most expensive school in the Big 10, but neither should it be at the bottom. Rather than artificially tying tuition increases to the CPI as SB 399 would do, UW-Madison's tuition should be considered in relation to the tuition at other Big 10 schools, with a goal of being at or slightly above the average of those tuition rates. Doing so, in combination with programs like Bucky's Tuition Promise and Bucky's Pell Pathway, would provide an ability to remain responsive to the changing landscape in higher education while maintaining our commitment to affordability.

This proposal also limits increases in segregated fees and differential tuition, which limits the ability of the campus to be responsive to student needs and demand for higher-cost academic programs such as engineering, nursing, and computer science. Graduates of high-demand programs like these tend to see higher salaries overall and multiple job offers.

There are two types of segregated fees that are paid by students: allocable and nonallocable. These fees directly fund many student services and resources on the campus. Allocable fees provide substantial support for campus student activities and are allocated by students through the student government process. Most of the segregated fees fall under nonallocable fees which are determined by the Chancellor with approval by the Board of Regents. Examples of nonallocable segregated fees at UW-Madison include debt service on renovations to the historic Memorial Union and construction costs for two new recreation facilities which were approved by students in a binding referendum; the operation of University Health Services, the Wisconsin Union, and UW-Madison Student Recreation & Wellbeing; and subsidy of the Madison Metro bus pass. Changes in the proposed legislation would limit the university's ability to address emerging student priorities, such as the recent demand for expanded mental health services.

Affordability and accessibility for Wisconsin residents is important to UW-Madison and will continue to be a top priority. However, the proposed changes outlined in SB 399 unnecessarily limit the university's ability to remain competitive and operate as a world-class institution. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 399. If you have questions, please reach out to Crystal Potts or Mitch Goettl (crystal.potts@wisc.edu; goettl@wisc.edu).