

DATE: January 8, 2026

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Office of Government Relations, Universities of Wisconsin

RE: Testimony for Information Only on Assembly Bill 659

Thank you, Chair Murphy, Vice-Chair Nedweski, and committee members for providing the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) an opportunity to submit testimony on Assembly Bill 659 (AB 659).

The UWs, with 13 universities, have one of the most robust programs for veterans and service members in the country. We strive to provide a welcoming higher educational setting for service members, veterans, and their families. Each of our universities has a veteran service department that provides comprehensive support to veterans. Dedicated university staff assist veterans with transferring credits, navigating benefits, and connecting veterans with each other and the campus community. UWs are always looking at paths to make it easier and more accessible for veterans and service members to attend our universities.

The UWs already offer qualifying veterans, spouses, and children full tuition and fee remission up to eight semesters or 128 credits. In FY25 alone, the UWs provided over \$36.8M in tuition and fee remissions and related payments to more than 4,300 veterans or their qualifying family members. The UWs covered \$31.4M of this total amount, while the state provided only \$5.4M in GPR to help offset the costs of the program. We support our veteran students, but costs for us to maintain this program continue to rise year-over-year. Yearly remission amounts for veterans have exceeded \$10M annually since 2015, and under current law, remissions for children and spouses have gone up 14% on average each year over the past five years, totaling nearly \$27M annually. As a result, UW Administration no longer has sufficient funding available to fully reimburse our universities for these tuition remissions due to these continuing cost increases, which means that those increased costs are borne directly by our universities.

Recognizing these rising costs, the UWs requested \$84M in funding in the 2025-27 biennial budget to sustain and cement our veterans remission program and to ensure our universities can continue recruiting and educating these valued students. A table of the rising costs for tuition remission payments over the last eight years is attached.

Currently, a veteran who was not a Wisconsin resident at the time of entry into military service is required to live in Wisconsin for at least five years prior to registering at one of our universities to receive these tuition and fee benefits. This same residency requirement to receive these benefits also applies to the eligibility for spouses and children of veterans who are at least 30 percent or more service-disabled. AB 659 aims to reduce the current residency requirement from five years to three years further expanding access to tuition and fee remission benefits. While this change is

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expected to increase the number of veterans and eligible family members who qualify for tuition and fee remission, it would also result in increased remission costs to the UWs over time without any additional state support.

AB 659 would also modify the UWs nonresident tuition exemption for veterans by eliminating the requirement that a veteran must have been a Wisconsin resident at the time of entry into active duty in order to qualify for resident tuition rates. This provision will further support veterans who have chosen to relocate to Wisconsin after their military service and wish to pursue higher education in our state but would result in additional foregone nonresident tuition revenue.

Thank you for giving the Universities of Wisconsin the opportunity to submit testimony for information only on this legislation. We thank the bill authors for their interest in expanding access to Wisconsin higher education for veterans and their families and the Universities of Wisconsin would welcome financial support from the state to cover the costs of the mandated remissions.