

DATE: January 6, 2025

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

FROM: Office of Government Relations, Universities of Wisconsin

RE: Testimony for Information Only on Assembly Bill 673

Thank you, Chair Spiros, Vice-Chair Piwowarczyk, and committee members, for providing the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) an opportunity to submit testimony on Assembly Bill 673 (AB 673).

The faculty and students at our 13 public universities are driving innovation every day and advancing research that strengthens Wisconsin's economy and improves lives across the nation. The Universities of Wisconsin are committed to safeguarding intellectual property and sensitive information tied to national security while fulfilling our mission of education, research, and student success for our more than 164,000 learners statewide.

AB 673 creates new restrictions around the use of genetic sequencing software and the storage of human genomic data at medical and research facilities across Wisconsin. Specifically, the bill would prohibit the use of genetic sequencing software developed by individuals or entities involved with any countries designated as a "foreign adversary" by the U.S. Department of Commerce. This bill would also prohibit the storage of human genome sequencing data within the borders of these countries.

We share the authors' intent to protect U.S. interests and research integrity. Safeguarding intellectual property and sensitive data tied to national security is a responsibility we take seriously. Our research activities already operate under rigorous federal and state regulations designed to protect sensitive information and uphold security standards. The UWs also have internal policies that have been created in conjunction with state and federal requirements to safeguard data. As just one example, UW System Administrative Policy 1031 requires all institutional data to be categorized based on sensitivity and risk. This classification determines how data must be protected and who can access it based on the level of risk.

While we agree with the legislative goals of ensuring the security and safety of our sensitive research, our state, and our country, we do have concerns that AB 673 could reduce the UWs' research competitiveness. The additional restrictions proposed in this legislation could diminish our ability to secure federal research awards which could affect recruitment and retention of faculty, researchers, and graduate students. The bill may also impair our capacity to participate in multi-institutional and international research collaborations, as well as reduce industry partnerships in Wisconsin's biotechnology and biohealth sectors.

(Cont.)

We would also anticipate significant operational challenges, particularly with procurement and replacement timelines for genetic sequencers and associated software. Any of our suppliers, regardless of the country listed for their business address, could have parent company lineage based in a prohibited country listed as a foreign adversary. This would make it difficult to achieve immediate compliance, especially as the list of countries outlined in this legislation is subject to change.

These unintended consequences could ripple across Wisconsin's research ecosystem, slowing innovation and weakening our competitive position in the global economy.

The Universities of Wisconsin remain committed to protecting sensitive data and advancing research that benefits Wisconsin and the nation. We appreciate the Legislature's interest in addressing security concerns and look forward to working together to ensure solutions that safeguard national security without diminishing Wisconsin's leadership in research and innovation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on AB 673.