

DATE: October 15, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges

FROM: Office of Government Relations for the Universities of Wisconsin

RE: Testimony for Information Only on Senate Bill 59

Thank you, Chair Hutton, Vice-Chair Cabral-Guevara, and committee members for providing the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) an opportunity to testify for information only on Senate Bill 59 (SB 59).

The Universities of Wisconsin, with 13 universities, has one of the most robust programs for veterans 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 campus staff assist veterans with transferring credits, navigating benefits, and connecting veterans with each other and the university community. The 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 only provided \$5.4M in GPR to help offset the costs of the program. The 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. 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 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. These benefits are also provided to the spouse or child of a veteran who meets specified criteria. SB 59 would eliminate the five-year residency requirement in its entirety, expanding access to this benefit to more veterans and their families. It would allow for a veteran, spouse, or child to receive these tuition benefits as long as they are a resident of the state immediately before registering to attend a UW university.

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Based on current trends, we project that total remissions for veterans are estimated at \$12.0M in fiscal year 2025-26. Remissions for children and spouses are currently estimated at \$30.7M in fiscal year 2025-26. In 2024-25, the cost to the UWs for total remissions for veterans, children, and spouses broke \$30M for the first time. While we support finding ways to increase accessibility for our veterans and service members to attend one of our universities, further expanding this access without additional state support to offset these anticipated costs will be difficult for us to sustain this program for future veterans, service members, and their families.

Thank you again for providing the Universities of Wisconsin the opportunity to submit testimony on this legislation.