



**Stephen L. Nass**  
Wisconsin State Senator

**SB 700 Wisconsin Merit Scholarship Program**  
Testimony of Senator Steve Nass  
Senate Committee on Government Operations, Technology, &  
Consumer Protection  
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Thank you Chairman Stroebel for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 700. This legislation will create the Wisconsin Merit Scholarship program. The program establishes new merit-based scholarships of \$5,000 each that will be awarded to Wisconsin residents that attend a UW-System school. It will be administered by the UW-System Board of Regents.

The scholarship will be awarded to Wisconsin students based solely on their academic merit. SB 700 requires the Board of Regents to determine student merit based on the student's performance on standardized college entrance examinations, and if applicable, cumulative high school grade point averages (GPAs). This legislation is supported by UW-System President Ray Cross.

UW-System schools have struggled to attract and retain the best and brightest in-state students in the past, partially because of a lack of merit scholarship assistance compared to other similar colleges and universities around the country. Many other flagship universities in the Big Ten Conference, for example, offer top students considerably more academic scholarship opportunities based on ACT and SAT scores. The Wisconsin Merit Scholarship is a step toward making UW-System schools more competitive in attracting the top students, particularly from Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Academic Excellence Scholarship (AES) is the only major state supported, merit-based scholarship program that currently exists. The AES awards the top graduates from Wisconsin high schools an average of \$2,250 per year to attend an in-state college or university. The new Wisconsin Merit Scholarship would be more than double that amount by comparison.

SB 700 does not require additional state GPR spending to fund the new merit scholarships. The scholarships will be funded by interest earnings from the Normal

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School Fund (NSF), which is administered by the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL). The proceeds of the NSF are required to benefit UW-System schools. Over time, any additional revenue and interest earnings from the NSF will allow more merit scholarships to be awarded to Wisconsin students.

Under current law, income and interest from the Normal School Fund (NSF) is appropriated to the Board of Regents annually to do the following:

1. Make need-based grants totaling \$100,000 to students at the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison who are members of underrepresented groups.
2. Provide scholarships totaling \$100,000 to students enrolled in the sustainable management degree program through UW-Extension.
3. Award the balance to UW-Stevens Point for environmental programs.

SB 700 changes the current allocation by requiring the Board of Regents to provide \$300,000 annually to UW-Stevens Point for environmental programs and use the balance to fund the merit scholarships created by this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this legislation creating the Wisconsin Merit Scholarship program to help attract and retain the best and brightest Wisconsin students at UW-System Colleges and Universities. If committee members have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.