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## Luther S. Olsen

State Senator  
14th District

**TO:** Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions  
**FROM:** Senator Olsen  
**DATE:** December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** Testimony for Senate Bill 505

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Thank you Chairman Marklein and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 505 (SB 505). This legislation is part of the package released from the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention.

Over the last year or so, I have been discussing with many of my constituents the concern of suicide among farmers. It has been a growing issue, and one that needs to be addressed. The price of milk has decreased over the years, which has caused many farmers to lose money and some have even gone bankrupt. This, along with other changes in farming over the years has caused an increase in suicide among farmers.

With these issues continuing to rise, as well as some challenges with cost for farmers to succeed, I have heard from many constituents that it is difficult for young people to want to enter into farming. Therefore, I was pleased to see legislation like this farmer tuition assistance bill come out of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention. We have attached a substitute amendment on this legislation to make a minor change to make these farmer assistance scholarships.

SB 505 with the Senate Substitute Amendment allows the Technical College System Board to make grants to current or prospective farmers in the state to assist with farmer tuition. These farmer tuition assistance scholarships would be used for the purpose of paying no more than 50 percent of tuition costs for enrolling in courses on farm management or farm finance offered by technical colleges. A student may receive these grants that do not total more than \$1,000 per year for 3 years. I believe that these grants will create a support system to better assist young people to want to enter into farming, to understand farm management and farm finance, and hopefully keep the younger generations growing in Wisconsin's farming industry.

I want to thank the members of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention for all of their work. Also, thank you for holding a hearing today. I ask for your support on SB 505 and I would be more than happy to answer any questions.



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# LOREN OLDENBURG

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 96<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Senate Bill 505

Relating to: farmer tuition assistance grants and making an appropriation

**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions**

**December 18, 2019**

Good afternoon, Chairman Marklein and committee members. I want to thank you for your willingness to hear Senate Bill 505.

This summer it was my honor to serve as a member of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention. I enjoyed my learning experiences while traveling across Wisconsin to hear more about how suicide has affected people from all across the state, and discussing what we can do in the Legislature to help. A main priority of mine was focusing on my community, the farming community.

It's no secret that the farming community has been having a tough time, but it's as important as ever to recruit young farmers so that we can keep Wisconsin, America's Dairyland. I've said for a long time, if you're a farmer, you're not just a farmer; you are an entrepreneur, accountant, CEO, manager, maintenance worker and so much more. Wearing all these hats, and still running a successful farming operation is a lot to take on, and that's why it is so important that we educate young people who are interested in becoming farmers.

Senate Bill 505, as amended, will allow scholarships to be administered by the Wisconsin Technical College System to current and prospective farmers. These scholarships will give farmers the opportunity to have all or part of their tuition covered for courses at a technical college. These courses will provide them with invaluable knowledge on topics like farm, business, and production management. Having access to training like this can help farmers have a better understanding of farm practices as a whole. Not only is this education important, but students will create a support system of other farmers while taking these courses. This will continue to be a benefit to these farmers for years to come.

Thank you again for hearing Senate Bill 505, a bill that will help educate and prepare farmers to run a successful farm and allow them to be equipped to deal with all aspects of the farming business.