

ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE SENATOR • 1ST SENATE DISTRICT

Phone: (608) 266-3512

Fax: (608) 282-3541

Sen.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

State Capitol - P.O. Box 7882

Madison, WI 53707-7882

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism
and Workforce Development
Senator André Jacque
February 4, 2020*

Colleagues on the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism, and Workforce Development,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 721, which I am happy to bring forward with Rep. Tauchen. This legislation will provide the much needed gap financing to ensure construction of The Experience Greater Green Bay Visitor Center in the form of a \$2M state loan. A broad coalition of local leaders have committed to investing and supporting the rest of this over \$6.5 Million project.

This investment is a “front door” for our entire state’s tourism industry and is ideally located to be visible and accessible at one of Wisconsin’s main visitor entry points to get visitors to do more and see more around our state. It is supported by Wisconsin’s Hotel and Lodging Association.

I am a proud supporter of the work of the Greater Green Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau, having worked directly with them on several events going back to my service working for the City of Green Bay. I’ve seen their former location and their temporary one, which are two fantastic arguments for the need of a facility that can fully tap into the potential that the nearly 6 million annual visitors to the Greater Green Bay Area bring, with an economic impact of supported businesses, jobs, state and local taxes that more than justify this investment.

This project has enjoyed strong support from Governor Walker, Governor Evers, and both sides of the aisle in the legislature, but we’ve differed on the details. This is a bi-partisan proposal in both chambers, and we still have a chance to come together and keep this opportunity from slipping through our fingers.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 721.



GARY TAUCHEN

State Representative • 6th Assembly District

(608) 266-3097
FAX (608) 282-3606
Toll-Free (888) 529-0006
Rep.Tauchen@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Chairman Jacque and members of the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism, and Workforce Development – thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on bipartisan Senate Bill 721.

Tourism is an economic powerhouse in Wisconsin. In 2017, \$13.3B was generated in direct-spending. Brown County has the 5th largest total tourism spending in our state, bringing in \$1.1B in total economic impact from its 5.7M annual visitors. This generates \$43.5M in local taxes, and \$53.6M in state taxes. Tourism in Brown County employs nearly 12,000 people.

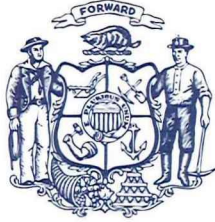
SB 721 provides a \$2M state loan for The Experience Greater Green Bay Visitor Center. Local businesses, individuals, corporations, tribes and others have committed to investing and supporting this \$6.5M+ project. This loan will help finalize funding.

The location for the visitor center will be at the corner of Highway 41 and Lombardi Avenue, which is the ideal location. It will be the first building people see when they get off the highway. The Experience Greater Green Bay Visitor Center will be a place of strong community and state pride by sharing the story of Wisconsin and our region. It will showcase Wisconsin as a great place to live, work, and play.

The goal of the Visitor Center is to expand visitor spending, extend their stay an extra night or two, and encourage repeat visits back to not just Greater Green Bay, but other vacation destinations around Wisconsin as well. In addition, The Greater Green Bay Chamber and other area businesses will partner with the Visitor Center in talent recruitment and workforce development. The Chamber and area and state businesses have an opportunity to showcase Wisconsin to the 5.7M visitors to the area each year.

The State of Wisconsin was a tremendous financial partner with the Wisconsin Discovery Farm Center in Manitowoc. The Department of Transportation has helped fund Wisconsin Welcome Centers in Kenosha, Beloit, La Crosse, and Menominee. Northeast Wisconsin is also a major entry point to the state. This \$2M state loan will help finalize funding for this important project.

Thank you again for holding this hearing on SB 721 and allowing me to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE STAUSH GRUSZYNSKI

REPRESENTING THE CITY OF GREEN BAY

Testimony of Rep. Gruszynski

Senate Bill 721

Loan to the Greater Green Bay Convention and Visitor Bureau for the construction
of a visitor information and education center

February 4th, 2020

Chairman Jacque, thank you for scheduling this bill for a public hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and help move this bill forward.

In 2019, Governor Evers proposed budget allocated funds for a visitor information and education center in Green Bay. Sadly, because of partisan politics on both sides, that funding never made it across the finish line. That is why I am excited and happy to be part of a bi-partisan solution to bring funding forward for the visitor information and education center in Green Bay. I would like to thank Representative Gary Tauchen for authoring this bill and working with all stakeholders involved.

Currently, \$4,500,000 has been raised through local business contributions, community contributions and foundation support. \$1,500,000 has also been contributed to the Convention and Visitor Bureau by the Oneida Nations. That should be celebrated. Brad Toll and his team at the Greater Green Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau have done an amazing job to move this project forward, but they need our help to get this across the finish line.

Senate Bill 721 requires the Department of Administration to award an interest-free loan in the amount of \$2,000,000 to the Greater Green Bay Convention and Visitor Bureau to assist in the construction of a visitor information and education center located in Brown County, and a stone's throw from the 90th Assembly District.

The money loaned to the Convention and Visitor Bureau by the state would be the final spark this project needs and I'm sure Brad will speak today about how this will continue to grow tourism in our community and will have a great effect on Northeast WI and our state. In 2018, visitors to Brown County generated \$52.5 million in state taxes and \$43.5 million in local taxes alone and bring in an estimated economic impact of \$1.1 billion.

The visitor information and education center in Green Bay would promote state, regional and local tourism, in addition to highlighting job opportunities in Brown County, to an estimated 5.7 million annual visitors – so let's make it happen.

Thank you for your time today.