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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 24TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 291

Public Testimony

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

May 20, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Murphy and members of the committee for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 291.

This bill would require universities in the University of Wisconsin System as well as the Wisconsin Technical Colleges System to allow parental attendance at any in-person commencement exercises those campuses may hold in 2021.

This spring, I was alarmed to hear that some UW campuses, including UW-Madison, planned to shut parents out from attending commencement ceremonies.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example, scheduled two ceremonies at Camp Randall, one for undergraduates and one for graduate students, with no parental attendance allowed. Camp Randall is an outdoor stadium with capacity for over 80,000 spectators. It is one of the most suitable venues in the state for such a ceremony.

In contrast, the largest university in the country by far, the University of Central Florida, has taken another approach. UCF split its commencement exercises into seven ceremonies over the course of three days, in an indoor arena with a capacity barely 10% of Camp Randall's. Each graduate received two guest tickets.

UW-Madison is no stranger to this model. Two separate ceremonies has been the norm in recent years, but let's go back just one decade. In spring 2011, UW-Madison held five ceremonies over the course of three days. Reverting to this model for one year would certainly have accommodated the additional attendees.

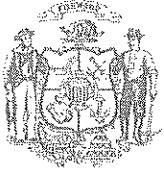
Other universities in our state have found additional creative ways to ensure safe participation for parents. Some, such as Beloit College, have implemented hybrid virtual events with multiple small-scale diploma ceremonies. Marquette University held its ceremony at American Family Field, with a capacity roughly half of Camp Randall, and still provided two guest tickets for each graduate.

Parents deserve to be there, in person, for their son's or daughter's graduation during one of the most important milestones of that child's life. Beyond the pride that comes with supporting their child's efforts—and let's not forget that many of these students are the first generation in their family to go to college—parental financial contributions make up the lion's share of payments toward college costs.

According to Sallie Mae, parental contributions from income and savings make up 44% of tuition payments, while an additional 8% of college costs are covered by parental borrowing. A whole 14% of parents dip into their retirement savings to help their children with tuition.

Our universities owe it to them to make an effort to include them fully at the culmination of those efforts.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.



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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Senator André Jacque
May 20, 2021*

Chairman Murphy and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 291, relating to University of Wisconsin commencement ceremonies.

I graduated from the UW-Madison with many friends and classmates who were the very first person in their family to graduate from college. Their parents frequently acted as a source of inspiration and encouragement throughout their academic journey. It is a fairly basic expectation for both students and their families that UW campuses should find a way to accommodate UW graduates by allowing their parents or guardians who provided emotional and financial support in getting them to their academic achievement a meaningful opportunity to attend their commencement celebration in recognition of their accomplishment.

So many other colleges and universities across the country have figured out ways to hold in-person graduation ceremonies that allow parents to attend. The UW should be able to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 291.