ELIJAH BEHNKE
STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 89th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

02/10/2022

Testimony on Assembly Bill 703
Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

Chairman Murphy and Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities,

Thank you for holding a public hearing today and allowing me to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 703 (AB 703), which relates to a freshwater collaborative between numerous University of Wisconsin System institutions.

Studying, monitoring, and improving our state's fresh water sources should be a priority. Not only is this the water we drink every day, but it's the water used in agriculture and nearly every business in Wisconsin. It's the water we catch fish in year-round and swim in during the summer. It impacts so many aspects of our daily lives, so ensuring its cleanliness is paramount.

AB 703 would create a freshwater collaborative within the UW System with two goals in mind; study the challenges of agriculture water management and study the challenges of water quality and safety.

To accomplish these goals, the collaborative would undertake a number of actions. This bill highlights those actions, including creating new water-focused training programs for undergraduate students, work-study internship programs with state agencies, scholarships to attract and retain talented students in this field, increasing marketing and recruiting efforts related to Wisconsin's role in freshwater science, and dividing the state into study areas to better understand regional water quality issues, among others.

AB 703 is a reintroduction of Assembly Bill 801 from last session, a recommendation from the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality, which passed the Assembly unanimously but could not be taken up by the Senate before the end of session. The funding for this initiative was included in the 2021-23 state budget, totaling $2.5 million in GPR.

With this bill, Wisconsin can become a trailblazer when it comes to freshwater science by attracting brilliant minds and conducting research that has tangible, every day impacts for the residents of this state.

Thank you again for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 703 and allowing me to testify in favor of it. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Senator André Jacque
February 10, 2022

Chair Murphy and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 703 regarding water quality monitoring improvement and the University of Wisconsin System freshwater collaborative.

Assembly Bill 703 is a proposal that merges two bills (2019 AB 801/SB 712 & 2019 AB 799/SB 709) developed through last session's legislative Water Quality Taskforce to make a variety of improvements to enhance Wisconsin's research, monitoring and training in concert with the UW System.

Through Assembly Bill 703 we are looking to provide a better accounting of water quality in Wisconsin and the relative return on investment of various investments in best practices like producer-led watershed management grants. Last session's legislation passed unanimously through the full Assembly, Senate committee, and the Joint Finance Committee but was not taken up before the abrupt end to the session. The funding for this initiative was already included in the enacted 2021-'23 state budget without the statutory framework this bill provides.

This legislation was developed in consultation with the Great Lakes Commission and is one of the priority recommendations of the bi-national 8 state, 2 province Great Lakes/St. Lawrence River Legislative Caucus' Nutrient Management Taskforce's recent final report.

Assembly Bill 703 requires the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System to fund a freshwater collaborative among no more than six UW institutions that has the following purposes:

1) studying the challenge of agriculture water management, including a focus on nutrient runoff, farm policy impacts, and other issues and

2) studying the challenge of water quality and safety, including a focus on treatment, contamination, and other issues.

AB 703 requires the freshwater collaborative to do all of the following to accomplish those purposes:

1) devise new watercentric training programs focused on undergraduates;

2) provide an opportunity for students to participate in a work-study internship program in a state office that coordinates state water policy;

3) provide scholarships and student support to retain and attract new talent;

4) amplify marketing and recruiting relating to Wisconsin's role in freshwater science;

5) enhance workforce development programming;

6) recruit new faculty and staff for training programs, research, and innovation;

7) act as a liaison to the Blue Accounting initiative of the commission created by the Great Lakes basin compact;

8) create a user-friendly dashboard for the public to easily access municipal water quality reports, private well data, and surface water quality information that must be compiled from information from the Public Service Commission, the Department of Health Services, the Department of Natural Resources, campuses of the UW System, the Division of Extension of UW-Madison, and other credible organizations; and

9) divide the state into areas to better understand each area's diverse and localized water quality issues and prepare a report on each area's unique water quality challenges, each area's known levels of specific contaminants, and the overall success of state and federal water quality programs in each area.

Assembly Bill 703 requires the Board of Regents to establish metrics for determining the success of the freshwater collaborative and submit those metrics to the Joint Committee on Finance. The Board of Regents may expend the moneys appropriated under the bill if JCF does not schedule a meeting to review the metrics. However, if JCF schedules a meeting, the moneys may be expended only after JCF approves or modifies the metrics.

The Board of Regents must appoint a nine-member committee to advise the board on how to allocate the funding among UW institutions. One member is the UW System president or his or her designee. The Board of Regents must appoint two members who are nationally recognized objective experts who have shown expertise in the field of water science. Those two members must be selected from a list of five individuals recommended by the UW System president or his or her designee. The senate majority leader and assembly speaker each appoint two members, with one representing the agricultural industry and the other representing a private sector nonagricultural industry. Finally, the governor appoints two members, with one representing a private sector nonagricultural industry and the other representing a municipal water utility of a second class city with a population of less than 150,000.

AB 703 also requires the Board of Regents to submit a biennial report to JCF and other legislative committees that shows how funding under the bill is distributed and expended at each UW institution as well as information on demographics and accomplishments of the collaborative.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 703.

WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities

2021 Assembly Bill 703

The University of Wisconsin System freshwater collaborative

February 10, 2022

Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities:

The University of Wisconsin–Madison thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding Assembly Bill 703, relating to the University of Wisconsin System Freshwater Collaborative. UW–Madison submits this testimony for information only.

As a leading public research institution, UW–Madison brings unique strengths to the Collaborative, including numerous major research facilities and hubs of freshwater research, teaching, and outreach. Among them are the Aquatic Sciences Center that supports the entire UW System, the UW Center for Limnology and the Water Science and Engineering Laboratory. Currently, there are five graduate degree programs that are water focused and about 30 others that include water. UW-Madison is also home to Sea Grant, another systemwide initiative. The national Sea Grant College Program supports coastal and Great Lakes communities through research, extension, and education. UW–Madison views the current Freshwater Collaborative as a model for how the UW System can work together to advance the lives of the people of the state of Wisconsin.

Existing water scholarship is dispersed at UW–Madison and across the UW System because the role of water is essential to many aspects of life and is integral to so many distinct academic disciplines. Scholarly activity relating to water is diverse, dispersed across the many schools and colleges at UW and with differing concentrations at the other UW System campuses. The Freshwater Collaborative aims to harness the excellence at each of these campuses, while allowing those students who wish to study water to experience the faculty and resources across the UW System.

In the 2021-23 State Budget, the legislature included $2.5 million in each year of the biennium of state support for the Freshwater Collaborative. The Joint Finance Committee approved this funding in their 13.10 meeting yesterday.

As written, Assembly Bill 703 changes how the proposed structure of the Fresh Water Collaborative would operate. The list of requirements in this bill far exceed the current scope and reach of the collaborative and would require significantly more resources to be appropriated than

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the funds currently dedicated in this bill. Specifically, the requirements on research on agricultural water management and water quality and the development of a public dashboard for public and private municipal water and well data would likely take up much of the funding on their own. The proposed legislation would simultaneously limit the flexibility and impact of the Collaborative while greatly increasing its scope relative to the funding provided. If this bill became law, the Freshwater Collaborative would change and may no longer be the systemwide research collaborative it was intended to be.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the impact this legislation would have on UW-Madison. If you have any questions, please reach out to UW-Madison Director of State Relations Crystal Potts at crystal.potts@wisc.edu or (608) 265-4105.

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DATE: February 10, 2022

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Deej Lundgren, UW System Interim Associate Vice President for Government Relations

RE: Written Testimony on Assembly Bill 703

Thank you, Chair Murphy and committee members, for providing the UW System (UWS) an opportunity to submit testimony on Assembly Bill 703 (AB 703), regarding the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin (FCW).

The FCW is establishing the nation's most significant, integrated, multi-institutional higher educational program for the freshwater economy. UWS officially formed the FCW in June of 2019 as a partnership of our 13 public universities with a mission to build and expand a statewide pipeline of career-focused education and training, as well as world-class research and innovation, that will propel job creation in Wisconsin. FCW's core purpose is to address the "Ten Grand Water Challenges" facing Wisconsin, focusing initially on two of these challenges: agricultural water management and water quality safety and emerging contaminants. The FCW is not only a collaboration between our universities, but with industry partners, local communities, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, and policy makers. We have appreciated the significant, bipartisan support the FCW has garnered from the legislature since its inception. The FCW is poised to showcase Wisconsin as an international water research and educational hub, while creating a statewide pipeline of talent to propel job creation.

Just yesterday, the Joint Committee on Finance approved a $2.5 million annual appropriation to fund an initial RFP that will focus on the two challenges of agricultural water management and water quality safety and emerging contaminants. The FCW is prepared to put this funding to use, with the first round of RFP applications ready for funding distribution. The FCW Steering Committee, comprised of members from all 13 universities and one representative from UWS, helped develop the RFP and selected the first round of programing. The RFP programing priorities fit into five award types under the focus of student engagement and learning. These award types include: student scholarships, student experiences, course development, collaborative research, and career development. The RFP also encourages proposals to focus on collaboration (interdisciplinary, between campuses), transformative experiences (internships, career opportunities, field experiences), and leveraged support (additional grant or industry partner funding).

(Cont.)

Based on the funding approved by JFC yesterday, along with the initial funding provided by UWS and WEDC, many of the requirements of AB 703 are already being executed by the FCW. Several of the additional items included in AB 703, such as the user-friendly dashboard, while certainly worthwhile, would cost more to implement than the current appropriation would allow. Additionally, a steering committee structure has already been established. While the bill aligns with several of our initiatives, if approved, the prescriptive nature of this bill would significantly shift the current direction of the FCW, just as funding has been made available to invest in the program as approved by the legislature. Passage of this legislation would significantly derail the progress of the FCW and investment appropriated yesterday.

Given the importance of the FCW to the state, we have a vested interest in ensuring that the annual investment made by the JFC and legislature provides meaningful and measurable results. As the initial funding is provided to these programs, we will be eager to share the impact of the state's investment to grow the mission of the FCW.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this legislation.