



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

DAN KNODL

STATE SENATOR • 8TH DISTRICT

Senate Bill 767

Public Testimony

Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection

February 8, 2024

Thank you to the members of this committee for your attention on Senate Bill 767.

This bill will require the Universities of Wisconsin to provide non-resident students with information on how to vote absentee in their home states. This bill dually promotes civic participation among our young adults while respecting their ties and responsibilities to their home communities.

Our public universities attract students from across the country. While our campuses encourage and facilitate voter registration and participation, this effort is focused primarily on enabling students to vote in their campus communities. A recent analysis suggests that only 15% of non-Wisconsin students remain in the state post-graduation. This statistic underlines a clear reality: the majority of these students have a temporary relationship with Wisconsin, with their permanent ties, and future contributions rooted elsewhere.

The bill does not restrict students' ability to register and vote in Wisconsin. Instead, it offers them the knowledge and tools to participate in their home state elections, where they may be more familiar and concerned with local issues in their hometowns than those in Wisconsin. Providing them with absentee voting information empowers them to make informed decisions that affect their communities directly.

I'd like to thank Representative Binsfeld for leading on this bill. Thank you for your time, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

AMY BINSFELD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 27TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection

Representative Amy Binsfeld

February 8, 2024

Chairman Knodl and Members of the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection:

Thank you for hearing Senate bill 767 which is aimed at improving the accessibility of voting for nonresident students within the University of Wisconsin System.

This bill requires that the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System takes proactive measures to inform all first-year students, through electronic or paper notice, about the process of requesting an absentee ballot from their home state. The notice will include an application and clear instructions on how nonresident students can complete and submit the absentee ballot to the appropriate authority in their home state.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 767 compels the Board of Regents to engage in voter registration or voter education partnerships, ensuring the dissemination of accurate absentee ballot information to nonresident students.

To enhance transparency and accountability, the board is required to submit an annual report to the legislature, detailing the implementation of SB 767's provisions. This reporting mechanism ensures ongoing oversight and evaluation of the impact of the legislation.

Senate Bill 767 addresses a crucial need to facilitate the civic engagement of nonresident students by providing clear avenues for them to participate in the electoral process, even when away from their home state. The bill's comprehensive approach, from notice provision to policy development and reporting, underscores its commitment to fostering an inclusive and representative democracy.

I urge the committee to consider the merits of SB 767 and its potential to enhance the democratic participation of nonresident students within the University of Wisconsin System.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take any questions you may have.



TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB 767

Wisconsin Senate Committee
on
Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection

February 8, 2024

Sam Rogers, *Visiting Fellow*
Opportunity Solutions Project

Good morning, Chairman Knodl and members of the committee. My name is Sam Rogers and I'm a visiting fellow at the Opportunity Solutions Project, a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting policies that expand freedom and opportunity for all Americans. More importantly, I'm a Wisconsin resident, a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Graduate and a Wisconsin voter.

Students voting is a good thing. With out-of-state student enrollment up 63 percent (not counting Minnesota), there are some unique challenges faced by those students when it comes to accessing voting options.¹

Today, it is current practice for University of Wisconsin students to receive voter registration information at freshman orientation and at regular intervals nearing important election days. What is not consistently provided is specific information on how to apply for and receive an absentee ballot in an out-of-state student's home state.

Right now this practice is lopsided, favoring education for voting in Wisconsin elections.

In the height of transitioning from high school to college, or from military service to higher education, tracking down absentee ballot processes for a home state might not seem like a priority, but once a student decides where they want to vote, it might be too late. A potential deadline to request their absentee ballot may have passed at home along with the opportunity to vote there.

Different states have varying municipal, state primary, and national primary dates and in the hustle and bustle of learning how to navigate school on your own in a new city and a new state, those opportunities to participate civically can slide by unnoticed.

With SB 767, during student orientation, UW System schools will be required to provide every out-of-state student with an application to request an absentee ballot from their home state and clear instructions on how to complete and submit it. If a school enters into a public-private voter registration contract or education partnership, those organizations must also provide the same information to out-of-state students. This gives all students equal access to voting opportunities in the place that they call home.

Our universities do a ton to encourage students to vote, the least they could do to help students seamlessly transition into a new state is to offer all avenues available for that student to vote during their initial orientation.

References

¹ Rich Kremer, "Out-of-state enrollments surge at UW System schools while resident enrollments fall," Wisconsin Public Radio (2023), <https://www.wpr.org/education/nonresident-enrollment-uw-madison-college-system-resident-students-wisconsin-tuition>.

Chairman Knodl, Vice-Chair Feyen, and the members of the committee, thank you for having us here today. My name is Nick Maxwell, and I too am studying at the University of Wisconsin River Falls.

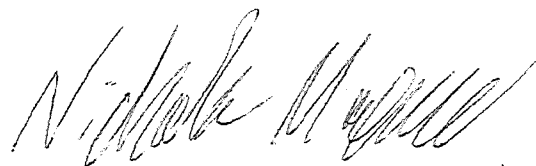
I would like to echo the testimonies of my peers by speaking to the number of students this bill benefits. 45% of students enrolled at the University of Wisconsin River Falls are Minnesota residents, one of whom is with us here today. A further 3% of students at River Falls are residents of another state.

The UW System has seen a steady increase in non-resident students over the last decade. In recent years, as reported by Wisconsin Public Radio, the UW System experienced an increase from 4,738 students in 2020 to 6,243 students in 2022. With a 31% growth in the non-resident student population, this demographic has become a greater focus for the UW System.

Even with a greater focus on the non-resident student population however, there is no serious effort to present non-resident students with the opportunity to vote absentee in their home districts. This fact has been made evident by the testimonies of my peers. In my experience as a student leader on campus, I am made aware of voter locations and registration information to share with fellow students. In my time at UW River Falls, I have never been informed of how non-resident students can vote absentee in their home districts.

For the reasoning provided by my peers and myself, I ask that this committee vote in support of Senate Bill 767.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be with you today.



Nicholas Maxwell

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to speak on Senate Bill 767. My name is Brady Penfield and I am a junior at UW-River Falls.

I believe that the Board of Regents must require all UW institutions to inform their out-of-state students on how to vote absentee in their home state. As it stands these out-of-state students are encouraged to vote in Wisconsin, which is only their temporary residence, instead of the local and state environments back home. These include school board, municipal, and county elections. This is a form of disenfranchisement. If a student is only attending a UW institution for a temporary stay and that student has full intentions to return to their home state after achieving their degree, their home state should be their priority in how they vote.

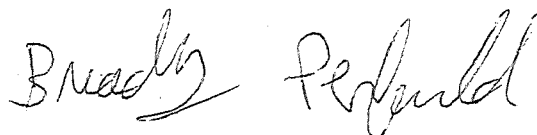
Granted, not all out-of-state students may have this mindset, but they should still be provided with the methods on how to vote in this manner. Also, they should not be pressured to vote in Wisconsin because it's unreasonable to encourage out-of-state students to vote in an election that won't as directly affect their lives and their family's lives.

Having attended UW-River Falls I have observed firsthand the lack of knowledge in how to vote absentee for non-Wisconsin residents. Nearly 50% of all students attending UWRF are Minnesota residents. When I talk to friends and acquaintances that are Minnesota residents living on campus there is a resounding answer that they have no idea on whether or not they can vote in Wisconsin or Minnesota. Furthermore, I'm sure that many of them may not even be aware that it would be illegal to vote in both Wisconsin and Minnesota.

This bill will provide the knowledge to prevent cross-state voting and the harmful consequences that would follow. In addition, it would enfranchise out-of-state students for the elections that impact them most.

It is difficult to foresee any drawbacks to informing young people on how to complete their civic duty. Passing this bill would ensure that this happens in an efficient manner.

Thank you for your time

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brady Penfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'B' and 'P'.

Maxx Beeler

Chairman Knodl, Vicechair Feyen, and committeeman, thank you for having me. My name is Maxx Beeler, and I am Junior at the University of Wisconsin River Falls. I come before you today as a civic duty advocate and a transfer student from a community college in Minnesota to UWRF.

I am currently in my second semester at UWRF and in my time there I have not seen an effort to inform out of state students on how to vote in their home state. While the campus does pursue voter drive initiatives, they only inform students how to register in the state of Wisconsin and are all focused on voting in the university's districts.

For students like me who still live relatively close to home, physically going home to vote isn't that big of a deal, but I am aware that many students don't have the luxury of a 35-minute drive home. I met two fellow students who are from Arizona, and they are at UWRF to play football. Being so far away from home means these two students are almost guaranteed to miss out on events happening in their local community back home.

These events would include local elections consisting of county board members, school board members and mayors. These local elections are what affect families the most.

College is supposed to be a place of education, not only in a student's chosen field of study but also in their responsibility to participate in their civic duties. Colleges should educate students on how to vote and their options on where they can vote.

The UW system is disenfranchising these young voters by not giving them the information they need to fully participate in the elections that matter the most.

I believe that the content of this bill should not only apply to freshman orientation but to transfer student orientation as well. Some students like myself do their first two years of college at a local community college then go out of state to a bigger four-year college. These students will go through orientation for the first time at a UW school just like first year students do. These out of state students deserve the same access to information on how to vote in their home state as incoming freshman do.

At this bill's core it is an informational bill. Providing more information is always better, especially when it comes to voting. This bill will help boost civic engagement while also preventing accidental voter fraud.

I urge you all to vote in favor of this bill.

Thank you.



DATE: February 8, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection

FROM: Universities of Wisconsin Office of Government Relations

RE: Written Testimony For Information Only on Senate Bill 767

Thank you, Chair Knodl and committee members, for providing the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) an opportunity to provide testimony regarding Senate Bill 767 (SB 767).

SB 767 would require our universities to provide first year, nonresident students information on how to vote absentee in their home state at student orientation. The Universities of Wisconsin encourage civic engagement for our students and recognize the importance of voting in a democratic society. Our campuses currently make Wisconsin voting information available to all students. SB 767 would require additional items to the voting information our campuses already provide and would create a significant administrative burden to comply.

SB 767 would require UWs campuses to research and verify other states' voting requirements. Additionally, our universities would be required to identify each student's home state and personalize voting information to individual students. Not only would our campuses be required to provide a student's home state voting information, they would also be required to provide information on where a student should mail their absentee ballot. This means our universities would have to provide them with individual, precinct level information. The research required to comply with this provision would be particularly burdensome and runs the risk of mistakes in the data that could cause incorrect information being shared with the student.

Currently, our campuses make general voting information available to students and many of them provide general resources about voting outside of Wisconsin. Voting information is made available to all students ahead of elections, not just new students. Additionally, at many of our campuses, the majority of students in their sophomore year and above, live in off-campus housing so are ineligible to vote on campus. Our campuses do not push students to vote on campus, but they do connect them with voting resources.

Again, the Universities of Wisconsin makes information on voting available to students because exercising that civic duty is integral to our democratic society. Students at our campuses are free to make their own voting decisions.

Thank you again for allowing the Universities of Wisconsin to provide testimony on SB 767.