



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

Media Release

For Immediate Release
December 5, 2023

Contact: Rep. Katrina Shankland
(608) 267-9649

Rep. Shankland and Rep. Emerson Introduce “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” Legislative Package with Higher Education Leaders

MADISON—Today, Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) and Rep. Jodi Emerson (D-Eau Claire) hosted a press conference with higher education leaders to introduce their “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” legislative package. The legislative package addresses the budgetary shortfalls facing higher education institutions, higher education access and affordability.

Following the press conference, **Rep. Katrina Shankland** stated, “Wisconsin's funding for our state universities ranks 43rd in the nation, and with the passage of the 2023-2025 state budget that failed to resolve the projected \$60 million deficit at our UW System, we will likely continue to drop. Today, we are introducing the ‘Reaching Higher for Higher Education’ legislative package to invest in our students, educators, and higher education institutions, ensuring that our state and economy will thrive for generations to come. Communities all across Wisconsin depend on healthy and vibrant UW System and technical college campuses. These communities are great places to live and work because of the energy, vitality, and opportunities made possible by our higher education campuses. However, the social and economic well-being of the communities supported by campuses across Wisconsin is threatened by the steep faculty and staff cuts at UW System. I am proud to join higher education leaders today to bring forward these commonsense bills that strengthen our technical colleges and universities and prepare our students to enter the workforce,” she concluded.

“The austerity that we have seen in the UW System over the past decade is a political choice, a choice that deeply shortchanges our students,” said **Jon Shelton, a UW-Green Bay Professor and AFT-Wisconsin Vice President of Higher Education**. “This package of bills is a down payment on the kind of future our students deserve, and the members of our union couldn’t be happier to stand with Rep. Shankland and Rep. Emerson in support of this legislative package.”

Rep. Jodi Emerson stated, “We are seeing long time faculty and staff leaving higher education altogether because they can get better pay, a more stable work environment, and the respect they deserve somewhere else. The UW is what makes Wisconsin great. It helps us make our cheese, and keeps folks healthy by training medical professionals across the state. We need to put our money where our mouth is. We need to fund our systems and keep them stable for generations to come.”

Maddie Topf, TAA Co-President, added, “Passing legislation that prioritizes the UW System is a commitment to the quality of teaching and research in Wisconsin. It is a commitment to the faculty, staff, and graduate workers who make up our higher education system.”

-more-

Summary of the “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” Legislative Package

LRB 0915: remits UW undergraduate student teachers’ academic fees for the semester they are student teaching.

LRB 0916: fully funds a tuition freeze for the 2024-2025 academic year by increasing funding for the University of Wisconsin System general program operations by \$38,000,000.

LRB 0917: requires that all future tuition freezes for the UW System be funded, ensuring our educators have the resources they need so students won’t have to wait for courses to graduate.

LRB 0918: expands the Tuition Promise program to all UW System institutions using state funding. In order to be eligible for the program, new incoming students must be enrolled in their first bachelor's degree whose household federal adjusted gross income is equal to or less than \$60,000 a year and must be enrolled in an on-campus program at a UW System institution other than UW-Madison.

LRB 0919: fully funds the Wisconsin Technical College System’s 2023-25 budget request by increasing state aid to technical colleges and district boards by \$49 million.

LRB 0920: increases need-based financial aid for UW System and technical college students by increasing HEAB’s biennial appropriation for Wisconsin Grants for UW students by \$22,518,700 in fiscal year 2024-2025 and for technical college students by \$8,357,700 in fiscal year 2024-2025. The additional funding will ensure HEAB is prepared for an influx of eligible students when the FAFSA Simplification Act of 2019 goes into effect on July 1, 2024.

LRB 0921: provides \$60 million in additional funding for the University of Wisconsin System under its general program operations appropriation to account for the system’s projected [\\$60 million deficit](#).

LRB 0922: creates a 19-member Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Higher Education composed of UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System faculty, staff, students, legislators, and higher education and workforce development experts to study and facilitate a discussion about a public agenda for higher education in Wisconsin and develop partnerships between the two systems.

LRB 4450: withholds per diem and mileage allowances for members of the Assembly and Senate until the Joint Committee on Employee Relations approves previously authorized pay raises for public employees already approved and enacted by the Legislature.

LRB 5130: creates a Student Success and Access Fund to ensure that students across the state have access to an affordable education within the UW System by supporting campuses in rural and underserved communities and UW System branch campuses. With campus closures being considered by the UW System, this program would allow UW institutions to apply for additional funding if student success and access are in jeopardy.