

# One Wisconsin Now: Higher Ed, Lower Debt Act introduced, Common sense reform to help student loan borrowers

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*State-Based Plan Would Help Borrowers Refinance Loans, Just Like You Can With a Mortgage*

MADISON, Wis. — With student loan debt rising to record levels and Wisconsin ranking in the top five states in the nation for percentage of graduates with debt, it's time for real solutions to help borrowers said One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Scot Ross. A state based plan reintroduced today by Democrats in the State Legislature that would help borrowers refinance their loans, just like you can with a mortgage, would be a great step forward, according to Ross.

“Nearly one million borrowers all across Wisconsin have done the right thing, working hard to get an education and taking on the personal responsibility to pay for it,” commented Ross. “But billions of dollars in student loan debt is preventing too many of these Wisconsinites from reaping the rewards of their efforts. Now is the time for real reform to fix a broken system and deliver real help to those that have earned it.”

Legislation unveiled today by Sen. Dave Hansen and Rep. Cory Mason – the *Higher Ed, Lower Debt Act* – would create a state authority to help borrowers to refinance their student loans at lower interests rates, extend an existing state tax deduction to include student loan payments and provide additional information and loan counseling to borrowers.

Hansen and Mason have introduced similar versions of the bill in the 2013 and 2015 sessions. Despite the strong, bipartisan support by the public, Gov. Scott Walker and the Republican-controlled legislature have blocked the measure.

Meanwhile, since 2011, under the policies of Gov. Walker and the Republican-controlled legislature, funding for higher education has been cut by record amounts, financial aid has been dramatically underfunded leaving tens of thousands of eligible students without help and tuition for University of Wisconsin students has been increased by double digits.

The result, unsurprisingly, has been a growing crisis of student loan debt. Wisconsin is in the top five states in the nation for the percentage of graduates with student loan debt. The state also ranks sixteenth for the amount of debt carried by graduates, with the average University of Wisconsin student matriculating with an average debt of nearly \$30,000.

Steadfastly refusing to take any substantive actions to help Wisconsinites no longer in school and ease their student loan debt burden, Gov. Scott Walker has instead advised these borrowers to literally, "call a bank" and commissioned a state website to list bank phone numbers. At the federal level, the Republican controlled Congress has blocked efforts to allow borrowers to refinance and now appear poised to loosen consumer protections and cut back funding for need-based financial aid.