

# Rep. Wachs: Comments on 'Wisconsin Campus Free Speech Act'

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MADISON-On Thursday, May 11, the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities heard testimony on Assembly Bill 299, "Wisconsin Campus Free Speech Act". This proposal, introduced by Representatives Jesse Kremer, Robin Vos, Dave Murphy and Senator Sheila Harsdorf, would require the UW System Board of Regents to adopt a policy on free expression that would be applied to all of the system's two and four year campuses.

Rep. Dana Wachs (D-Eau Claire), a member of the Committee, issued the following statement after the public hearing:

"As a private citizen, an attorney, and a legislator, I have a deep respect for the First Amendment and the rights it provides to our citizens. Free speech is a fundamental part of having a healthy democracy, and our campuses have historically been a place for different viewpoints and perspectives to be discussed and explored.

The bill we heard today is a substantial overreach for a problem that frankly does not exist. Instead of supporting free speech for all students, the authors of this bill have created a broad, vague proposal that could chill speech and ultimately silence those who want to respectfully share their beliefs on an issue.

The First Amendment was designed to allow speech from all perspectives, especially when it expresses views contrary to our own. However, instead of allowing our students to explore their own ideas and protest those ideas they find

reprehensible, this legislation was introduced to prevent debate and prohibit protests. By threatening our students with semester-long suspensions or expulsion, this legislation uses draconian sanctions to try to strong-arm students into staying silent. This is contrary to the very core of First Amendment rights.

Instead of continuing to find ways to suppress students' speech, we should embrace the thoughtful and respectful exchange of ideas. No one should feel unsafe or threatened for speaking their mind."