

Rep. Sargent: Protecting local communities from fraud & deception

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MADISON –Representative Melissa Sargent (D-Madison) issued the following statement to announce the release of LRB-3152/1, which reforms the existing criminal statute to include a criminal penalty for impersonating a public officer, public employee, or employee of a utility, co-authored by Representative Jim Ott (R-Mequon):

“Under current Wisconsin law, it is a Class I felony for a person to assume to act in an official capacity or to perform an official function, knowing that they are not the person that they are presenting themselves to be. Additionally, it is illegal to exercise any function of a public office knowing that they are not qualified to act, for example an individual impersonating a judge and falsely officiating a marriage. That said, it is not illegal for an individual to represent oneself as a public officer, public employee, or the employee of a utility with the intent to mislead others into believing that he or she is a public official. For example, if an impersonating person pretended to be a state representative in an attempt to receive discounts on products or services, or to gain priority access to local establishments, they would not currently be held accountable under Wisconsin’s current law.

LRB-3152/1 looks to close this egregious loophole by making it a Class I felony to represent oneself as a public official or employee with the intent to mislead others into believing that they are actually a public official. Unfortunately, this practice of

misleading business owners is not something new. There have been cases of this occurring right here in the 48th Assembly District, yet, due to current Wisconsin statutes, these individuals face no consequences. Without swift action, our local communities will continue to be subject to such ruthless fraud and deception.

We must do all that we can to protect our local communities from those who look to take advantage of their hospitality. Our small businesses are the backbone of our communities, and we cannot allow scammers to manipulate our valued community members without repercussions. This bipartisan legislation puts our community members first, and closes an absurd loophole in our statutes that is well overdue.”