

Rep. Sargent: Wisconsin's promise

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MADISON – Representative Melissa Sargent (D-Madison) released the following statement announcing LRB-5690 which creates the “Wisconsin Promise Program” to address Wisconsin’s crippling student debt:

“Our state prides itself on our renowned education system, from our K-12 schools to our strong University of Wisconsin-System, technical colleges, and private institutions. It is vital that students have the opportunity to take advantage of these highly respected places of learning, and continue to grow for their futures.

Further, Wisconsin is home to some of the brightest students, strongest youth leaders, and forward-thinking innovators. The fate of our state rests in the hands of these crucial community members and we have an obligation to make sure that they have resources they need to succeed. Sadly, due to rising education costs, these hardworking individuals are forced into a system that does not help them achieve their true potential.

Across the United States, there are more than 45 million students who owe approximately \$1.6 trillion in student debt and roughly 1 in 5 students are behind on student loan payment. In Wisconsin, our students now see an average student debt of \$31,705. Our state is ranked 30th for states with the lowest student debt at graduation. This is unacceptable and is clearly holding back our state’s economic capabilities.

Today, I am proud to stand with my Democratic colleagues in proposing a real solution to Wisconsin’s student debt crisis and college affordability with the introduction of the Wisconsin Promise Program. This bill ensure that Wisconsin students have the financial resources that they need to succeed, while also making sure that we retain the brightest students that our state has to offer.

This bill extends tuition and educational expense funding to Wisconsin students for 60 credits of academic work- or typically 4 semesters/2 years for a full-time student. This grant funding can be applied to any UW-System institution, state-recognized technical college, or tribally controlled college in the state. Upon accepting this financial assistance, students would commit to maintaining a GPA over 3.0 and working in the state of Wisconsin for at least three years after graduation. This bill also including important provisions that extend these resources to undocumented members of our community to make sure that everyone in our state has access to this financial life-line.

By promising that anyone who wants to pursue higher education has the resources they need to succeed, we are taking important steps towards freedom of thought and civic justice. I am proud to be the lead author of this important bill and will continue to advocate for real solutions to address Wisconsin's crippling student and college affordability crisis."