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STATE SENATOR TWENTY-SECOND DISTRICT

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## **Wirch Rips Republican Motion to Ban Covid Prevention Measures on UW Campuses as Case Numbers Surge**

**Madison** – Sen. Bob Wirch (D-Somers) is assailing an action by Republicans in the State Legislature, led by Sen. Steve Nass (R-Whitewater), prohibiting UW System campuses from requiring Covid-19 preventative measures, including masking, Covid testing and vaccinations. Nass, who chairs the Legislature’s Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules (JCRAR), and his fellow Republicans on the Committee plan to require that the UW get approval from the Republican-controlled Committee before enacting any Covid-related requirements. The move comes as Covid cases are once again surging, propelled by the highly-contagious Delta variant.

“This is a ‘big government’ mandate from Sen. Nass. It defies explanation; standing in the way of health- and life-saving measures is a baffling cause to take on. Even Tommy Thompson has said this is a bad move, from both a public health and an education standpoint. My colleague from Madison, Sen. Kelda Roys, has said that the plan shows Republicans ‘would like as many people to get sick and die as possible...It sends a terrible message that this cohort of Republican senators don’t care about the lives and health of students and people on our UW campuses.’ Republicans have yet to show any concern for the health and wellness of the people of Wisconsin.”

JCRAR plans to hold an executive session on Tuesday, August 3, to approve Nass’s motion without a public hearing or any input from public health or higher education experts. Thus far, no UW campuses have issued vaccine mandates for students, but some will require unvaccinated students to undergo weekly Covid testing; UW-Milwaukee has instituted a mask requirement. Several private colleges and universities in the state, which are not subject to the same state oversight, are requiring students to be vaccinated; these include Marquette University, Lawrence University and Beloit College. UW System Interim President (as well as former Republican Governor and Secretary of the federal Department of Health and Human Services) Tommy Thompson has warned that stripping the UW System of Covid prevention tools poses a big threat to in-person instruction. According to State Department of Human Services Deputy Secretary Julie Willems Van Dijk, college students already face increased risk of infection, living in high-transmission settings such as dorms and apartments; often attending classes in large lecture halls; and participating in risky behaviors such as house parties and bars. In Wisconsin, the seven-day average of new Covid cases at the end of last week was double what it was the week before and almost eight times higher than it was a month ago.

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