



WISCONSIN FAMILY ACTION
Marriage|Family|Life|Liberty

PO Box 7486 • Madison WI 53707-7486
608-268-5074 (Madison) • 866-849-2536 (toll-free) • 608-256-3370 (fax)
info@wifamilyaction.org • www.wifamilyaction.org

TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 562
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2021
JULAINÉ K. APPLING, PRESIDENT

Thank you, Chairman Thiesfeldt and Education Committee members, for the opportunity to submit by email this testimony on Assembly Bill 562. I regret that I am not able to attend the hearing today because of a previously scheduled out-of-state obligation.

Wisconsin Family Action supports this bill on a provisional basis. We regret that the short notice we were given did not allow for a more thorough analysis of the bill or give us the opportunity to build a greater case on its behalf.

The importance of having parents involved in their child's education cannot be overstated. Topics such as sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression are no exception and are actually issues demanding higher scrutiny and greater opportunity for parents to know what is being taught and promoted.

These issues by their nature deal with human sexuality, including sexuality expressed outside the bonds of a natural marriage, which is a marriage between one man and one woman. These are topics that parents rightly have a great and direct interest in. As their children's first and most important teachers, they are desirous that they, rather than a teacher or other school district employee be the ones discussing these matters, which are distinctly value- and ethics-laden, in addition to being "hot-button" cultural and political issues.

While parents may choose a public school as an educational partner, parents retain the responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interest of their children both in school and out of school. Parents can only effectively make such decisions if they are aware of what is being taught in the classrooms and in the school in general. This bill is intended to better inform and involve parents in our public schools, and we applaud the effort.

Assembly Bill 562 actually highlights the overall need for schools to make curricular and instructional materials much more transparent and easily accessed, such as that proposed in Assembly Bill 488, which had a public hearing last month. While AB 562 details that the notice to parents about programs related to sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression must include "information on how the parent or guardian may inspect all materials, curriculum, and other components of the program," this does not necessarily mean it will be easy for parents to actually "inspect" the materials. We would recommend that "all materials, curriculum and other components of the program" be required to be accessible through the home page of a district's internet site. The burden for accessing the materials should not be nearly exclusively on the parents; the district must be made to bear a sizeable amount of the burden by making access as easy as possible. Parents can make knowledgeable decisions in the best interest of their children if they have accurate and complete knowledge as to what will be taught, the materials used, and any other information related to the "program."

In addition, we are concerned that the bill does not specifically address school assemblies or special speakers. As "program" is defined, one would have to interpret "instruction" and/or "activity" to include such situations. We believe schools looking for a way to avoid the provisions in this bill could possibly deem a school assembly with a special speaker who is presenting on one of the topics enumerated in AB 562 as not being included in the definition of "program" and thus not requiring parental notification. If Legislative Council could clarify whether

the current language would include such school assembly/special speaker situations, that would be helpful moving forward with this bill.

We also highly recommend requiring that parents intentionally opt their children *in* to any program (or assembly/special speaker) related to sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or gender expression, rather than having to opt them *out* of such a program as the bill currently provides. This change, which means no student can attend without his/her parent's/guardian's affirmative permission offers a better safeguard for both parents and students.

While we have some recommendations for improving the bill, we definitely support it as an earnest effort to begin protecting students from being exposed to subject matter that is best left to the discretion of parents. The more parents know, the better decisions they can make for their children.

Again, thank you for affording us the opportunity to submit this testimony electronically. We will have a representative of our organization go the hearing and register Wisconsin Family Action as being in favor of (not speaking) Assembly Bill 562.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions about this testimony or our position on AB 562.