



State of Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board

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Scott Walker
Governor

John Reinemann
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TO: Members, 2012 Commission on Financial Aid Consolidation and Modernization

FROM: John Reinemann, Executive Secretary
Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB)

RE: FIRST MEETING OF THE 2012 COMMISSION

DATE: May 11, 2012

This paper is being prepared for the 2012 Commission on Financial Aid Consolidation and Modernization, which was created by 2011 Wisconsin Act 176. The purpose of this paper is to provide background on the Commission's creation and to discuss a plan of work for the Commission.

2011 Wisconsin Act 176 creates the Commission within HEAB (the State of Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board) and charges the Commission with studying

- (A) The potential for consolidating all grant programs administered by the higher educational aids board into a single, comprehensive, need-based grant program, and
- (B) Options for providing grant aid for students who are attending Wisconsin institutions of higher education at less than full-time credit loads.

Act 176 requires that the Commission report its findings to the HEAB Board and the legislature by December 1, 2012. The Act also provides for the membership of the Commission, in part by naming specific members and in part by designating appointments to the body.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMMISSION

The 2012 Commission follows directly from a 2010 Wisconsin Legislative Council Study Committee, the Special Committee on Review of Higher Education Financial Aid Programs. The committee was to "review current laws relating to financial aid for higher education in order to improve student access to higher education, maximize utilization of higher education resources, and retain qualified graduates in Wisconsin. Policies for review may include: (a) the Wisconsin Covenant; (b) loan forgiveness programs; (c) Wisconsin/Minnesota tuition reciprocity; (d) academic excellence scholarships; and (e) need-based grants and loans." (Final report of the committee, May 2011)

At the August 2010 meeting of the Legislative Council committee, overviews were provided of the financial aid programs currently offered by the State of Wisconsin and administered by HEAB. The presentations are available online at the web site of the Wisconsin Legislative Council. Presentations at the August 2010 meeting were made by invited speakers.

The committee met in October 2010 to hold a public hearing, and presentations from that hearing are similarly available on the web site of the Wisconsin Legislative Council.

The committee met on four occasions from August 2010 through December 2010, and in May 2011 the committee recommended four proposals to the Legislature for consideration. These proposals are summarized below.

- 2011 Assembly Bill 141, relating to the Minnesota-Wisconsin student reciprocity agreement, the Wisconsin higher education grant program, and making an appropriation.
- 2011 Assembly Bill 142, relating to enrollment requirements for recipients of talent incentive grants.
- 2011 Assembly Bill 143, relating to the Wisconsin higher education grant program, tuition grant program, Lawton minority undergraduate grant program, minority undergraduate retention grant program, and making appropriations.
- 2011 Assembly Bill 144, relating to creating a commission on financial aid consolidation and modernization.

At a future meeting of the Commission, the three proposals not approved by the 2011 legislature will be reviewed briefly. Some of the issues addressed by AB 141, 142 and 143 have been dealt with or have changed in status since the bills were introduced, but the Commission will wish to be briefed formally on the status of these issues when it considers them as part of its larger deliberations.

MISSION AND SCOPE OF THE COMMISSION

As noted above Act 176 creates the Commission and charges it with studying

- (A) The potential for consolidating all grant programs administered by the higher educational aids board into a single, comprehensive, need-based grant program, and
- (B) Options for providing grant aid for students who are attending Wisconsin institutions of higher education at less than full-time credit loads.

Act 176 requires that the Commission report its findings to the HEAB Board and the legislature by December 1, 2012. The Act also provides for the membership of the Commission, in part by naming specific members and in part by designating appointments to the body.

I believe that the Commission has two tasks before it in determining its scope. One is to determine what sorts of issues and proposals the Commission should discuss; the other is to actually discuss those issues and arrive either at a recommendation, or at a conclusion that on some items a group recommendation will not result.

I anticipate that the first meeting of the Commission will include a discussion of how the Commission will accomplish these tasks. I ask that members of the Commission come to the first meeting with thoughts about these challenges.

I particularly ask that members bring to the first meeting, a list of topics and proposals that they feel are appropriate for the Commission to consider. I also ask that members consider what topics, if any, would seem to be beyond the scope of the Commission given our very limited mission and finite amount of time in which to prepare a report.

Again, my suggestion is that the Commission build a list of topics agreed to, before discussion of the topics takes place. It is my hope that this process will allow the Commission to focus its efforts in an effective manner.

ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

Act 176 requires that the Commission report its findings to the HEAB Board and the legislature by December 1, 2012. The Act also provides for the membership of the Commission, in part by naming specific members and in part by designating appointments to the body.

The Commission is a direct product of the 2010 Legislative Council Study Committee, and there is considerable member carryover and institutional memory on the 2012 Commission from the 2010 study committee. Several members of the 2012 Commission were members of the 2010 Legislative Council Study Committee; other members of the 2012 Commission made presentations to the 2010 study. All the materials prepared for the 2010 committee are available online and will be accessible to the 2012 Commission.

For these reasons, I believe that the 2012 Commission will be able to conduct its work without a need to recreate the entire process of the 2010 Study Committee. Still, in speaking with interested parties about the Commission, it does seem that there is interest in creating some mechanism for input to the work of the Commission by interested parties.

On that basis, it is my suggestion that the Commission consider having a public hearing at one of its meetings, after it has defined somewhat the list of topics to be considered but before the actual discussion of these topics takes place. The remainder of the meetings would be working sessions of the Commission, open to the public but not participatory in the manner of a public hearing.

It is my hope that the Commission will consider this proposal at its meeting on May 18.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE COMMISSION

The 2012 Commission on Financial Aid Consolidation and Modernization is unusual in its structure and in its makeup. Unlike a Legislative Council study committee, the 2012 Commission is not legislative in nature. This means that the usual rules, structures, and procedures of legislative committees are not automatically applied to the Commission.

The Commission has been created by the Legislature and the Governor. It is a public body that will be making recommendations on public policy. A reading of the Wisconsin open meetings law, Wisconsin Statutes s. 19.82, seems to clearly indicate that the 2012 Commission on Financial Aid Consolidation and Modernization is subject to the Open Meetings Law. For this reason it is the intention of HEAB that the meetings and documents of the Commission will be open and public.

- HEAB staff will be providing meeting notices and meeting agendas to the legislative chief clerks' offices and to media outlets.
- Meetings will be noticed at least 24 hours in advance, and our goal will be for as much time as possible.
- HEAB has created a page on its web site where we will post meeting notices and agendas, discussion documents, and other items for the use of the Commission. This page can be accessed via the main HEAB web site at www.heab.wisconsin.gov

- Persons interested in receiving notice of the Commission's meetings are invited to contact the HEAB office at 608-267-2206 or by email at HEABmail@wisconsin.gov

TIMEFRAME FOR THE COMMISSION

Because the 2012 Commission is not a Legislative Council study committee, the Commission cannot rely on the mechanism of having its recommendations introduced as bills authored by the Legislative Council. Bill introductions based on Commission recommendations may certainly occur in the 2013-2014 Legislative session, of course, but it cannot be assumed that this will automatically take place.

Governor Walker's office has indicated that they are interested in the results of the Commission and hope to receive its report as soon as possible. Specifically, the Governor's staff has indicated that they hope to have some indication of the Commission's direction as they begin the process of crafting his recommended budget for the 2013-2015 biennium in the summer and fall of 2012.

The timeframe for the Commission is already quite short. However, as previously noted, the 2012 Commission has a very specific scope defined for it by Act 176, and presumably will have the benefit of the work done by the 2010 study commission.

With these thoughts in mind, it seems possible and desirable to me that the 2012 Commission strive to have a sense of its direction by the end of August 2012. Crafting of a final report may require time beyond this, but I respectfully ask the Commission members to consider our situation and to contemplate a "rough deadline" of August 31, 2012 for the completion of discussions about our recommendations.

Meeting this deadline will require frequent meetings during the coming summer. On some occasions, some members of the Commission may have to participate via remote audio connection. HEAB staff will make every effort to assist you in the tasks facing us, including arranging audio participation if requested.

FUTURE MEETING DATES

The scheduling of future meetings will of course depend on the availability of Commission members. Without wanting to impose a schedule or particular dates on the Commission, when I began to organize a framework for the Commission I felt it was prudent to reserve meeting dates and a meeting room that could always be changed later, but that would allow us to complete our tasks.

Accordingly I share with the Commission that facilities have been reserved for the Commission on the following dates. These dates are a starting point, and can certainly be changed if the Commission desires.

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|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| May 18 | June 8 | June 29 | August 10 |
| August 23 | September 21 | October 19 | Others as needed, if needed |

CONCLUSION

Thank you for your willingness to serve on the 2012 Commission on Financial Aid Consolidation and Modernization. I look forward to working with you and I anticipate constructive and productive discussion.