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STATE SENATOR • 17<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

**February 6, 2018**

## **Senate Committee on Transportation & Veterans Affairs Testimony on Senate Bill 765 & Assembly Bill 716**

Good morning!

Thank you Chair Petrowski and committee members for hearing Senate Bill 765 (SB 765) and its Assembly companion bill (AB 716), which would allow communities to place municipal welcome signs in the highway right-of-way.

Representative Brooks and I have been working on this topic since last session when we introduced 2015 Assembly Bill 550 (AB 550). This issue was brought to our attention by the City of Mauston, after they purchased four “Welcome” signs. City Administrator Nathan Thiel testified at the Assembly hearing on AB 716 that they have been able to negotiate locations for three of the four signs, but the fourth location along Hwy 82 remains without a sign. If the city could secure a location on private property, outside the right-of-way, the sign would be at least 100 feet from the roadside.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) regulates signs based on the Federal Highway Administration’s standards contained in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The purpose of the MUTCD is to ensure uniformity of traffic control devices across the nation. Ultimately, the goal is to promote safety and help avoid crashes or other delays on our roadways.

After listening to input in the previous session, we made two modifications to the proposal. SB 765 has statewide applicability, and is not community specific. Also, the bill defines a Welcome sign as an “official” sign, rather than a traffic control device.

Our local officials in Mauston, know their community and want to ensure the safety of their residents and visitors alike. I believe that local law enforcement and city officials should be trusted to make these decisions.

AB 716 passed on a voice vote in the Assembly, January 23, 2018, and Citizen for a Scenic Wisconsin registered in favor of both bills on the Ethics Commission website.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of this bill, and I would welcome any questions.



# EDWARD BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

## Testimony in Support of 2017 Senate Bill 765 & Assembly Bill 716

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for hearing these bills today.

In many communities across Wisconsin there are signs welcoming visitors. Sometimes, these signs are located in a state highway right-of-way within the boundaries of the community.

Commonly, these signs demonstrate community pride, and will say something like, “welcome to (insert your community’s name) - home of (insert high school mascot or famous person or unique product or natural feature).”

If your community wants to place a new welcome sign in a highway right-of-way, or wants to replace such a sign currently in a highway right-of-way, it can’t, unless it is a sign meeting specifications delineated in the Federal Highway Administration’s Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The MUTCD compliant signs could be described as stamped out, metal cookie-cutter signs.

The State of Wisconsin is a party to the federal MUTCD, and publishes its own supplemental version called the Wisconsin Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (WMUTCD). The stated goal of the MUTCD is to, “...ensure uniformity of traffic control devices across the nation. The use of uniform TCDs (messages, locations, sizes, shapes, and colors) helps reduce crashes and congestion, and improves the efficiency of the surface transportation system.”

The threat for non-compliance with the MUTCD is loss of federal highway funding.

In the interest of full disclosure, there are other options for communities, but when the best option is placing a welcome sign in a right-of-way, then I think leaving that decision to a community should be permitted under state law.

Last session, I introduced 2015 Assembly Bill 550 on behalf of the City of Mauston. The city had four welcome signs they wanted to place at four entrances to the city, each in a state highway right-of-way within the limits of the city.

The city worked with the Wisconsin DOT and private property owners to gain easements on private property for three of their four welcome signs, rather than placing them on public land.

The best placement for the fourth sign was, and still is, determined to be on a state highway right-of-way.

My hope for the bill last session was for a reasonable solution for the city, and a policy change within the Wisconsin DOT that would accommodate all communities in Wisconsin.

Unfortunately, that did not happen.

Last session, many of our colleagues had expressed an interest in a bill that would be applicable across the state. This is why these bills have been brought forward, with a statewide application, this session.

An important change to the proposal is to designate a welcome sign as an "official sign". This is a statutory term that is not well defined, however, with this bill, we begin to sculpt out a definition of an "official sign".

One thing is clear, a welcome sign is not a traffic control device, and therefore should not be regulated as such.

In closing, I'd like to point out that this legislation is supported by Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, and the Wisconsin Towns Association.

Thank you for your consideration of these important bills today.