



MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony for SB 280

Senator Mary Felzkowski

Committee on Transportation and Local Government

September 27, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman Tomczyk and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 280, which will allow for tribal nation welcome signs to be constructed and maintained on tribal lands.

As you drive through Wisconsin there are numerous sights to take in, from expansive forests to gorgeous lakes and rivers. Beyond the natural beauty of our state, we also boast a wide array of friendly communities that epitomize Midwest hospitality, many of them greeting visitors new and old with a welcome sign as they drive into town. These signs, often stationed in the right-of-way of a highway leading into a municipality, tell travelers and residents alike exactly where they are, what the boundary of the community is, and makes them feel at home as they enter.

This bill will give federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands the same ability to install and maintain “tribal nation welcoming signs” within the right-of-way of any highway within the boundaries of a reservation or other land held in trust for the tribe. This signage will allow tribes to denote the boundaries of their land, as well as offer a friendly welcome to those that enter these territories. As with municipal welcome signs, they will not be able to construct these signs in the right-of-way of an interstate highway.

I am grateful to my Assembly author, Representative Mursau, for his work on this legislation. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.



Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Transportation and Local Government
SB 280-Tribal Nation Welcome Signs
September 27, 2023

Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 280, relating to tribal nation welcome signs.

This summer, thousands of us traveled across Wisconsin on our state highways. As we made our way along the scenic state highways and approached new communities, we were greeted with an official welcome sign letting us know we had arrived. Most of us probably didn't think twice about these signs, but they do serve a larger purpose!

The signs are not meant to be outdoor advertising or traffic control devices, instead they are installed and maintained by local governments (towns/villages/cities/counties), and show motorists the territorial boundaries of a municipality.

Under this bill, a federally recognized American Indian Tribe or band in this state would be authorized to install and maintain a "tribal nation welcome sign". The sign could be set up within the right-of-way of any highway within the boundaries of the Indian reservation or other land held in trust for the tribe or band, and will inform motorists of the territorial boundaries of tribal reservations and trust lands.

Simply put, this bipartisan bill extends the authorization to erect welcome signs available to towns, villages, cities and counties to our tribal nations and bands in Wisconsin.

Once again, thank you for holding a public hearing on this piece of legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Forest County Potawatomi Community

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Testimony on SB 280 – Tribal Nation Welcome Signs

Good afternoon, Chairman Tomczyk and members of the Committee. My name is Manny Johnson, and I am the elected Treasurer of the Forest County Potawatomi Community.

Thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me to speak on SB 280 which will allow tribal governments the ability to install welcome signs at their boundaries just like other towns, villages, cities and counties currently do across Wisconsin.

When driving through our state, it's common to see these larger, more elaborate signs welcoming visitors to different areas of Wisconsin. These signs proudly welcome you to places like "The Musky Capital of the World" (Boulder Junction), the "Cheese Curd Capital" (Ellsworth), or "Wisconsin's Czech Capital" (Hillsboro). These welcome signs provide visitors with a glimpse into the community and highlight the pride its residents have in their hometowns.

Attached to my testimony are several examples of these welcome signs.

The Potawatomi have wanted to install similar welcome signs at our reservation boundaries for several years, but unfortunately current state law does not allow it. We worked with the Department of Transportation to find a solution which would allow us to install these welcome signs. However, it was clear that current statutes don't provide tribal governments with this ability, which is why this legislation is before you today.

This legislation simply creates parity and will allow a tribal government in Wisconsin the ability to install a welcome sign at their boundaries just like other governments currently do across the state.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.









