



University of Wisconsin-Madison
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School of Journalism & Mass Communication

June 14, 2013

To the Wisconsin Legislature,

We, the undersigned faculty and staff of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, are writing to express our strongest opposition to the Joint Finance Committee Resolution 999, which seeks to prohibit collaboration between the School and the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism. In doing, we would like to explain why the work of the Center and its collaboration with the School directly benefit Wisconsin students and citizens in the best tradition of the Wisconsin Idea, and why, further, ending this collaboration would harm both Wisconsin students and citizens and raise a tangle of legal questions for nonprofit collaboration in Wisconsin moving forward.

As many of you know, the journalism profession is undergoing tremendous change. In particular, the newspaper industry nationally is facing financial challenges during the period of transition to an Internet-based business model. These difficulties are exacerbated in Wisconsin with its dozens of high-quality, local newspapers that are struggling in the new environment. Many of our students go to work in these papers, often returning to their hometowns or nearby larger towns and cities. Newspapers are a significant source of quality jobs in Wisconsin. But, more important, they are essential to local civic life.

The Wisconsin Center has helped to sustain our newspapers in this difficult time in two ways. By providing high quality content on important public issues, the Wisconsin Center enhances the quality of local journalism in Wisconsin; and by providing trained journalists who stay in Wisconsin, it helps sustain journalism's future.

As you likely know, Madison's hometown paper, the *Wisconsin State Journal* often supports both the governor and the legislative majority editorially, but still deems the work of the Center worthy of frequent publication and has editorialized against the JFC resolution. Why? Because the *WSJ* Editorial Board recognizes that fair, non-partisan, investigative journalism benefits *all* citizens regardless of party and helps weed out waste and corruption.

Our nation's founders recognized the watchdog role of newspapers when they wrote the First Amendment to the Constitution, and it is reaffirmed in our own Wisconsin Constitution. We recognize that sometimes these stories step on toes, but that is the role of journalism in a democracy, and the Center's work is published in papers that editorially favor both major parties.

Wisconsin cities and towns in every corner of the state have benefited from the WCIJ-Journalism School collaboration and its student interns: La Crosse, Madison, Wausau, Green Bay, Marshfield, Stevens Point, Manitowoc, Appleton, Chippewa, Wisconsin Rapids, Portage, Fond Du Lac, Ontario, Oshkosh, Sheboygan, Ashland, Superior, Augusta, Sun Prairie, Eau Claire, Juneau, Janesville, Beaver Dam,

Milwaukee, and Beloit, among others. Surely, this is a cost effective investment in supporting the newspapers and people of the state.

There has been a national discussion of the so-called “teaching hospital” model of journalism training, in which journalism schools partner with non-profit journalism institutions like the Center and often disseminate the results through the for-profit system of journalism. This is a variant of the kind of public-private partnerships that the legislature presumably envisioned in approving the recent venture capital bill, or in setting up the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. The Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery is an internationally recognized example of a public-private-nonprofit partnership. There is no stated rationale why one form of public-private partnership is acceptable, while another is not. Will others have to be dissolved?

The Wisconsin Center also helps train journalists for the future, not only nationally, but here in Wisconsin. The Center provides not just formal internships but guest lectures, case studies, story ideas, and technical expertise that faculty and students rely on both in and out of the classroom. This assistance is only possible because of the Center’s location in the School. The value of the training and paid internships provided by the Center *far* exceeds the minimal space and electricity provided, not only monetarily, but in its contribution to both good jobs for Wisconsin students and, perhaps more important, good reporters for Wisconsin newspapers. Virtually all Center interns have begun promising careers in journalism, many here in Wisconsin.

Beyond this, the WCJ-School of Journalism collaboration is in the best tradition of the Wisconsin Idea. In the School of Journalism alone, we have a number of active collaborations with local nonprofits, to help provide local journalism and strategic communication training and advising, including, for example, the Susan G. Komen Foundation for the Cure, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and Combat Blindness. More broadly at the University of Wisconsin, the Morgridge Center for Public Service is a major sponsor of nonprofit placement for students and the Center for Nonprofits assists hundreds of nonprofits a year, bringing in national funding.

We ask: what are the legal implications of Resolution 999 for this widespread collaboration with nonprofits that is woven into the very fabric of the UW-Madison, and many other campuses as well? Millions of dollars a year of foundation and government funding are brought to our campus, based on our collaboration with nonprofits, not only in journalism, but also in agriculture, health, science, and many other aspects of community life. If this principle is applied, will *all* nonprofit collaboration be threatened? If not, why not? What legal principles distinguish this action from others? We respectfully submit that the Resolution has legal and economic implications that reach far beyond the Center and the Journalism School.

For the health of the newspaper industry in Wisconsin, for the good job opportunities for students and UW graduates, for the flow of communication in our local democracy across the state, and for the legal implications of the Resolution for all nonprofit collaboration, we ask respectfully that the Legislature remove Resolution 999 from the budget.

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