

Testimony for Senate Bill SB 671 by Richard Burgess, Jan 24, 2018

I am Dick Burgess, presently Professor Emeritus of Oncology at UW-Madison. I have been a professor and member of the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research since 1971. I was President of PROFS for about 3 years, 2001-04, and so have had the opportunity several times to come to a hearing such as this and testify on behalf of something that is important to the university and to me. Presently I am Vice-President for Science for the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. I am also on the Advisory Board of WiSolve/ACE, a group dedicated to advocating for, supporting, and increasing successful entrepreneurial activity by the Faculty, Staff and Students at UW-Madison.

After a one-year sabbatical at a biotech company in Seattle in 83-84, I was offered a position with the company at three times my university salary. However, I decided I would rather be a professor at a first rate university and I wanted the university to be UW-Madison. I decided to return to UW-Madison but work to see that more of the discoveries here became products and services of benefit to the citizens of Wisconsin. To do this, I founded the UW Biotechnology Center in 1984 and was its Director for 12 years. I realized that even if I discovered a potential cure for a type of cancer, no one would ever benefit unless a company developed the discovery, went through the long and expensive clinical trials to get evidence that it really worked and then manufactured and sold the drug.

For many years, campus entrepreneurs, interested in possibly starting a company, wanted to do things correctly, not get in trouble. But without clear disclosure and oversight, we were afraid to act. (Like walking across a long footbridge with no railings, in the fog. You stay far from the edge). I was one of the initial members of the UW-Madison Conflict-of-Interest Committee (COIC) in the late 1990's. The development of the strong oversight and management of potential conflicts by the COIC, gave entrepreneurial members of the University community the guidance they needed to move forward.

As a result, in 2001, I co-founded a biotech company, which is still today located at the University Research Park, to develop more effective ways to combat antibiotic-resistant bacterial pathogens.

Many of my present activities are directed toward reducing barriers to university-business interactions. The present SB 671 is a perfect example. It takes advantage of the outstanding oversight activities of the COIC and does away with a nearly meaningless and outmoded State statute, that significantly delays and effectively discourages or prevents many productive company-university collaborations. I urge you to support SB 671.