

To: Legislative Colleagues

From: Representatives Tony Kurtz and David Armstrong

Senator Patrick Testin

Date: December 8, 2025

Re: Co-sponsorship of LRB-3566/LRB-5743, relating to: the opportunity attraction and promotion program administered by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

Deadline: December 18, 2025 at 3pm

2023 Wisconsin Act 19 created the Opportunity Attraction Fund for WEDC to support opportunity attraction and promotion. Grant funding may be used to: (a) bid against other states or jurisdictions outside the state to attract an opportunity or event that will draw national exposure and drive economic development and visitors to this state; and/or (b) host an opportunity or event that will attract national exposure and drive economic development and visitors to this state that the eligible applicant has secured through a competitive bid against other states or jurisdictions outside this state.

Since its creation, this program has helped secure several wonderful events across the state including, but not limited to, the NFL Draft in Green Bay, the USA Triathlon in Milwaukee, a National Youth Bowling Tournament in Green Bay, and a World Horseshoe Tournament in Wausau.

Unfortunately, WEDC and the tourism industry have run into some bumps with the current program not being able to function an expedient enough fashion to help the tourism industry in a fast pace bidding situation. This prevented the money from being used, or in some cases, communities ultimately turning their awards down because they had already missed deadlines to bid.

The changes in this bill aim to ensure this program is working effectively and getting money out the door in an efficient manner while promoting Wisconsin and growing our economy through our incredible tourism industry.

The bill will making the following changes to the program:

- Changes the award type from a “grant” to a “sponsorship”- A grant, according to WEDC's statutes, policies, and procedures, is subject to rigorous review that takes 6-8 weeks. Event opportunities often arise with little time to act and be competitive with other states bidding for the event. Additionally, grants \$501,000 or more require approval by a committee by the board which generally meets once every two months. Grants of \$2,000,000¹ or more additionally require approval by the WEDC Board of Directors. Sponsorships, according to WEDC's statutes, policies, and procedures, is subject to thorough, but more expedited review and approval. Sponsorships go through background and conflict of interest checks, legal review that all requirements are met (in this case that all statutory requirements have been met), and approval by the marketing division and by the CEO.
- Would allow up to 25% of the annual funding allocation to be used for events that are not open to the public to qualify for sponsorships if they meet certain criteria such as: It would NOT fund in-state events that are regularly scheduled or those that rotate destinations within the state. While not open to the general public, the event demonstrably attracts national exposure or contributes substantially to statewide or regional economic growth. Finally, additional consideration may be given if the event being applied for filled a need period or off-season.

LRB-3566/LRB-5743 is a product of conversations with WEDC and the tourism industry on how to make sure the program functions properly and promptly to ensure the money is getting out the door and we're not missing out on great opportunities for Wisconsin.

If you are interested in co-sponsoring LRB-3566/LRB-5743, please respond to this email or call Rep. Kurtz's office at 9141 or Sen. Testin's office at 6-3123. All co-sponsors to the Assembly Bill will be added to the Senate version unless otherwise requested.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill makes various changes to the opportunity attraction and promotion program administered by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

Under current law, WEDC must establish and administer an economic development program for the purpose of attracting major opportunities and events to this state. Currently, any city, village, town, or county, American Indian tribe or band, area visitor and convention bureau, business improvement district, or private entity (eligible applicant) may apply for a grant under the program, and WEDC must award grants to eligible applicants for major opportunities and events projects that meet certain criteria. The bill eliminates the grant program and instead requires WEDC to sponsor eligible applicants for major opportunities and events initiatives that meet the current law criteria.

Under current law and, except as described below, under the bill, an eligible applicant must expend all moneys received from WEDC on a project (initiative under the bill) to attract to this state or host in this state, or both, a major opportunity or event that is open to the public, whether or not free of charge. Specifically, WEDC moneys may be used to undertake a project (initiative under the bill) to do one or more of the following: 1) bid against other states or jurisdictions outside this state to attract an opportunity or event that will draw national exposure and drive economic development and visitors to this state or 2) host an opportunity or event that will attract national exposure and drive economic development and visitors to this state that the eligible applicant has secured through a competitive bid against other states or jurisdictions outside this state.

The bill authorizes WEDC to award sponsorship moneys to eligible applicants to expend on initiatives to attract or host in this state major opportunities or events that are not open to the public if WEDC determines that the opportunity or event will attract national exposure to this state or contribute substantially to statewide or regional economic growth. Under the bill, WEDC must give special consideration to applications for such sponsorship moneys for initiatives WEDC determines would occur during a tourist offseason or a period of economic need for the state. Additionally, no such sponsorship moneys may be for opportunities or events that WEDC determines are regularly scheduled or rotate destinations within this state.

Under current law, an eligible applicant must include in its application an estimate of projected direct and indirect economic benefits of the proposed opportunity or event and a related cost-benefit analysis concerning the opportunity or event. The bill eliminates that requirement and instead requires WEDC to estimate the projected direct and indirect economic benefits of an eligible applicant's proposed opportunity or event before awarding a sponsorship to the eligible applicant.

Under current law, an eligible applicant must secure from nonstate sources an amount equal to the amount of the proposed grant award. The bill eliminates the requirement that

matching funds must be nonstate sources and provides that matching funds for sponsorship awards may be cash or in-kind contributions.