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WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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**Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 956**

*Assembly Committee on State Affairs*

Tuesday, January 3, 2026

Chairman Swearingen and committee members, thank you for holding this hearing today and allowing me to speak in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 956. I appreciate Senator James' willingness to work with me on this important legislation.

Under current law, the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) may require the owners of places of employment and public buildings to install fire suppression devices, including sprinkler systems. While sprinklers can be a very effective fire suppression tool, in buildings that are used to store certain agricultural chemicals, water from a sprinkler system can pose serious environmental risks. In these buildings, other forms of fire mitigation must be used.

A couple of years ago, I was contacted by a constituent who owns an agricultural chemical business in my district and was having difficulty obtaining a variance from DSPS. High winds had blown down a storage building for his business, and he planned to rebuild it exactly as it was. However, when he sought approval from DSPS, he was told that he would need to install a sprinkler system in the new building, even though water should not be used to suppress a fire in the building due to the chemicals that would be stored there. He had been working with an engineer for several months attempting to get DSPS to approve a variance from the sprinkler requirement.

My office began advocating with DSPS on his behalf, and finally, after nine months of back and forth, the department approved a variance for his new building. However, this came at the expense of months of lost income for his business, and thousands of dollars spent on engineering costs. It does not have to be this way.

Instead of requiring Wisconsin businesses to go through a time-consuming and expensive variance process, AB 956 simply exempts these warehouses from the requirement to install fire sprinklers. This exemption does not apply to an office or store located within or attached to the warehouse. The bill also makes clear that DSPS or local governments are not prevented from requiring any other form of fire detection, prevention, or suppression.

In addition, to ensure that local fire departments understand the situation should a fire occur at one of these exempted warehouses, the bill specifies that the exemption only applies if the owner of the warehouse notifies the chief of the local fire department that water should not be used to suppress a fire at the warehouse and informs them of any changes to the chemicals stored there.

Mr. Chairman and members, I ask for your support of AB 956 and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.