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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 369 *Senate Committee on Economic and Workforce Development* June 15, 2021

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill (SB) 369 today. I appreciate having the opportunity to work with Representative Krug, Senator Testin, and Senator Felzkowski on this important legislation.

When the Verso paper mill closed last year the impacts were felt far outside of the Wisconsin Rapids area. Prior to its closure, this mill utilized approximately 25% of all the pulpwood harvested in Wisconsin. With this major customer gone, many timber professionals who sold to this mill have struggled to find new buyers for their product. I have heard from loggers in my district who lost 50% or more of their business when the Wisconsin Rapids mill closed. A large number of them have been unable to find new customers to replace the loss of Verso.

Beyond the impact on the timber industry, the closure of the Wisconsin Rapids mill has also negatively impacted the budgets of many northern counties. A number of counties across the Northwoods receive a significant amount of revenue from timber sales out of their county forests. For example, Rusk County which I represent is facing a loss of about \$267,000 annually. In Sawyer County, the loss is about \$204,000 annually. Other counties around northern Wisconsin are facing similar challenges.

Outside of the financial impacts, the harvest of timber is an important part of forest management. If the reduction in the harvest of pulpwood caused by the Wisconsin Rapids mill closure is not reversed the health of our state's forests could suffer resulting in an increased fire risk amongst other problems.

SB 369 would make a big difference in northern Wisconsin by providing the necessary funding to reopen the Wisconsin Rapids paper mill and return a very important customer for Wisconsin's timber industry. In addition, an amendment added in committee in the Assembly would also provide funding to reopen the paper mill in Park Falls. While this mill is smaller than the Wisconsin Rapids mill, adding another customer in Northern Wisconsin will be good for our state's timber industry and the local economy.

Mr. Chairman and members, I ask you to join me in supporting SB 369 and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.