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To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities  
From: Rev. Breanna Illéné, Director of Ecumenical Innovation and Justice Initiatives,  
Wisconsin Council of Churches  
Date: October 4, 2023  
Re: Testimony in opposition to Assembly Bill 465

The Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC) is a network of Christian churches and faith-based organizations committed to working together across our many differences to promote collective good. We connect 21 Christian traditions, which have within them approximately 2,000 congregations and over one million church members. Exercising holy imagination, we help one another make courageous choices that lead toward peacemaking, social and economic justice for Wisconsin's most vulnerable residents, the vitality of the church, and the well-being of our neighbors.

As a Council, we have adopted a statement on Nonviolence that reminds us that "Faithfulness to its mission requires the Church to speak out against violence, minister to its victims, and work tirelessly to reduce the level of violence in society." We come here today to decry the violence in AB 365.

Transgender individuals are unnecessarily under attack, and this legislation is just one of many items currently before our state legislature that cause undue harm to a marginalized community. The isolation and demonizing that this bill promotes are spiritually harmful, empowering hate speech and hateful action. Transgender individuals are children of God who deserve a dignified existence.

Loving our neighbor is a basic ethical presupposition common to many faiths including our Christian scripture. It calls for unreserved respect for and identification with our neighbor, as a fellow human being created in the image of God. No one is excluded.

Access to quality medical care is a fundamental human right for all of God's people. This access should be free from stigma and discrimination. Denying transgender adolescents access to affirming and life-saving medical care is an act of violence. When marginalized people face violence, stigmas, and discrimination, we further marginalize and dehumanize them.

Our faith teaches that God is relentless in pursuit of well-being for the world and its inhabitants. We seek the common good. As Christians, we are called to facilitate communities of well-being, and public policy that does not harm. In this spirit of love and accountability, we reject AB 365 on its merits, and we ask this body to do the same.

Thank you for your time.