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Senator Darling and Members of the Senate Committee on Education

My name is Kim Kaukl, I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WiRSA). I am writing on behalf of Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WiRSA) members in opposition to SB 454. Our organization represents and supports over 230 members with 167 rural school districts, several CESAs, technical colleges, universities, businesses, and individual members.

Our organization has registered in opposition of the SB 454 and companion AB 446. I want to clarify that our organization and the educators that are part of our organization are not opposed to reading and strongly support reading education. There are many strong programs being used in our schools that could be used as models. Our reason for opposing this bill is because it is narrowly crafted and misses the points on what is needed to improve reading education. The bill, as written, is prescriptive in requiring testing but lacks any support for teacher professional development and investing in resources for student support. The Assembly Committee on Education invited Dr. Kymyona Burk, the Policy Director for Early Education at ExcelinEd to show them the steps Mississippi used to improve reading. Along with early screening, her comments enforced the importance of investing in teacher professional development and investing in resources for student support. Unfortunately, these two key-factors were overlooked in this bill. It is because of this oversight in the bill's language that we oppose SB 454. Our educators understand the importance of educational support after testing as being key to helping a student go from struggling to succeeding as a reader. Many times, it is through the reading support process that the teacher finds the key that hooks a student on reading. I understand this because I was one of those struggling readers at an early age.

In conclusion, SB 454, as written, may end up being an unfunded mandate for districts, due to lack of resources, trained personal and/or enough personal in general to do the required testing. More importantly this bill falls short of what truly needs to happen to help this process succeed. We ask that you oppose SB 454 and ask the authors why these key components were omitted from the bill.

Thank you for your time and taking my written testimony into consideration.

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