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MEDIA RELEASE

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ACLU of Wisconsin Applauds University Support For Academic Freedom in Lecturer's Case

MILWAUKEE: Today, the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin applauded the University of Wisconsin—Madison for adhering to the University's own policies and procedures that protect academic freedom, when making its decision to allow a lecturer, Kevin Barrett, to continue to teach a course this fall entitled Islam: Religion and Culture.

Barrett, who has expressed unconventional views on the September 11, 2001 attacks on our country, has been the center of a political controversy which has included some candidates and legislators calling for the termination of his contract.

ACLU of Wisconsin Executive Director Chris Ahmuty said today, "The University's task was to evaluate Dr. Barrett's qualification and ability to teach his assigned course based on the course's requirements, not the content of his speech. It has apparently followed that process and applied the proper standards."

Ahmuty also remarked, "Controversial speech, especially controversial political speech, deserves protection from government censorship. Although teachers and other public employees do not have absolute freedom of speech in their official capacities, the government must not stifle legitimate academic dispute in order to avoid controversy."

"Academic freedom is good for Wisconsin, if we believe that a world class university system is necessary to train and attract the kind of workforce we need to prosper. Universities that censor unpopular views, for instance in the former Soviet Union, fail their communities. Civil liberties are good for all of us," Ahmuty concluded.

The ACLU of Wisconsin had faxed a letter to Madison Chancellor Wiley earlier in the day urging him to support academic freedom. Ahmuty's letter to Chancellor Wiley is attached.

The ACLU of Wisconsin is nonprofit organization which has nearly 9,000 members in Wisconsin.