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For Further Information Contact:

Representative Frederick P. Kessler
608.266.5813

End Special Treatment for Politicians

*Representative Kessler calls for reform to the venue provision
of the 2007 Government Accountability Law*

MADISON – Representative Frederick P. Kessler (D-Milwaukee) is circulating a proposal that would reform the venue provision of the 2007 Government Accountability law in order to eliminate the special treatment currently allowed to politicians under investigation for misconduct in public office.

2007 Wisconsin Act 1 merged the Election Board and Ethics Board to create the Government Accountability Board (GAB). It also featured a component that makes it illegal for individuals involved in a GAB investigation to disclose information about the investigation and a component that allows for public officials, candidates, and lobbyists suspected of violating elections or ethics laws to be prosecuted and tried in the county where they reside instead of where the alleged violation occurs.

In Wisconsin, with certain exceptions, any individual suspected of committing a crime is prosecuted in the county where the crime was allegedly committed, not the county where they reside.

“This law makes politicians a special class with exclusive rights that are not enjoyed by the general public,” Representative Kessler explained. “As a simple matter of fairness this portion of the law should be addressed.”

The venue provision was a hotly debated issue during the January 2007 Special Session that led to the passage of election and ethics reform bill, as Representatives Kessler, Black, and Cullen offered an amendment to remove this aspect of the bill. However, the amendment was ultimately defeated.

“As I said when this bill was discussed in the Assembly nearly two years ago, politicians should have to follow the same laws that govern everybody else,” Kessler stated. “This is a matter of judicial process and there is no need for special treatment.”

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