MILWAUKEE DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly and the Wisconsin State Senate

July 2, 2015

*** Individually Addressed and Delivered to Assembly and Senate Republican Members ***

Dear Colleague,

We write as Legislators and residents of Wisconsin's largest City to ask that you join us in our efforts to amend Wisconsin's 2015-17 State Budget. There are many pieces of the state budget that we would like to see changed...most of the budget actually. We write, however, with the sincere ask for support to delete one provision that directly targets Milwaukee.

We're not asking for money; we're asking for the opportunity to have a capable leader do her work and for an end to the status quo of legislated chaos that has been thrown at our school system over the last several years.

During the floor debate, Democrats will offer an amendment to delete the proposed Milwaukee Public School takeover. We ask for your support and vote for that amendment.

Do not allow the takeover of Milwaukee Public Schools to remain in the budget.

There has been zero input from key stakeholders on the proposed change, which was inserted into the Budget at 1:30 a.m. on Wednesday, May 20, 2015. As a member of the majority, you have the votes to pass a stand-alone bill – any stand-alone bill. You do that a lot. The idea of the takeover is so new and so major; it deserves its own debate, even if the outcome is the same.

As important background, you must know that Milwaukee's education landscape is as diverse and competitive as any place in America. We currently have 3 school districts with roughly the following enrollments: Milwaukee Public Schools (80,000 students); Voucher Schools (25,000 students); Independent "2-R" Charter Schools (8,000 students).

We cannot afford a fourth school district. We also don't need it. It isn't the 1980's. MPS offers incredibly diverse and flexible options for students and has consistently improved student performance in several critical areas. High School graduation rates have increased every year for a decade. In struggling schools, MPS has introduced the "Commitment Schools Initiative," targeting many of the same schools eligible for the takeover. After its first year, Commitment Schools are showing positive results and increased test scores. Progress is happening.
Beyond the truth that the takeover is not needed, there are **five major flaws** with the plan as it stands in the budget:

First, Milwaukee Public Schools are under the capable leadership of Dr. Darienne Driver. Dr. Driver started on July 1, 2014. She earned her Ph.D from Harvard's Education Leadership Program and has broad community buy-in in Milwaukee. We are lucky to have her and she deserves the opportunity to lead. **The takeover plan weakens Dr. Driver's authority.**

Second, the takeover will hurt teacher recruitment. Under the plan, if a school is taken over, every teacher is fired regardless of merit. They may reapply to the school under the control of the new district, but will lose their workplace protections, which could include health insurance and retirement. Why would a teacher want to work in a school where he or she could be fired without warning or without fault? **Great teachers at struggling schools shouldn't feel threatened and shouldn't be fired.** They are too valuable to the students in schools who most need them.

Third, the State is taking a huge risk. Every school district has a certain minimum head count needed to remain financially solvent. A fourth school district in Milwaukee could result in the loss of enough students to put MPS in financial jeopardy. What happens if MPS goes bankrupt? **Your school districts may pay in.** This is exactly what is currently happening in Michigan.

Fourth, the takeover plan as written can expand beyond Milwaukee. Beloit and Madison would be the next two districts. **You may be next.**

Fifth, the takeover plan isn't equal. Seven of Milwaukee's ten worst schools are voucher schools, yet the takeover allows these failings schools to continue on unchecked. **Why would the plan not apply to failing voucher schools?**

Lastly, **the takeover plan is policy and doesn't belong in the budget.** Jamming the idea into the budget without debate is bad governing. Regardless of whether you believe the takeover is a good idea or a bad idea, it should be removed from the budget. Our community deserves to give input – which wasn't possible at 1:30 a.m.

The proposed change will last a generation; please do not let this happen without the proper consideration. We ask that you join Democrats from Milwaukee, and beyond, in voting for an amendment to the Budget deleting the proposed takeover plan.

Thank you for your time and consideration and we welcome any opportunity to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

State Senator Tim Carpenter
3rd Senate District

State Senator Chris Larson
7th Senate District

State Senator Lena Taylor
4th Senate District

State Senator Nikiya Harris Dodd
6th Senate District

State Representative Evan Goyke, Chair
18th Assembly District

State Representative Mandela Barnes
11th Assembly District

State Representative LaTonya Johnson
17th Assembly District

State Representative Fred Kessler
12th Assembly District

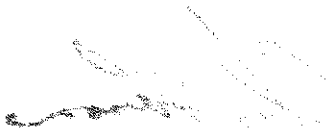
State Representative David Bowen
10th Assembly District

State Representative Leon Young
16th Assembly District

State Representative Jonathan Brostoff
19th Assembly District

State Representative Daniel Riemer
7th Assembly District

State Representative JoCasta Zamarripa
8th Assembly District

State Representative Christine Sinicki
20th Assembly District

State Representative Josh Zepnick
9th Assembly District