MILWAUKEE DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly and the Wisconsin State Senate

September 23, 2011

Members of the Milwaukee Common Council
200 East Wells Street
City Hall, Room 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Office of the City Treasurer
200 East Wells Street
City Hall, Room 103
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Office of the Mayor
200 E. Wells Street
City Hall Rm.201
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Office of the City Comptroller
200 E. Wells Street
City Hall, Room 404
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Common Council Members, Mayor Barrett, Treasurer Whittow, and Comptroller Morics:

As members of the Milwaukee Legislative Caucus, we are writing to request that you adopt and implement the Milwaukee Public School Board's proposal to break out the tax levy associated with the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) from the tax levy for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) on all annual tax documents sent to taxpayers.

Inclusion of this information would amount to a simple act of truth in advertising and transparency in government. Milwaukee's taxpayers deserve to know exactly how much of their money is going to fund private and religious schools through the MPCP.

As you know, in 2010, state law compelled MPS to levy over $50 million in taxes to subsidize the private and religious schools that make up the voucher program, over which MPS has no authority or control. This amounts to 17 percent of the total MPS tax levy going to non-MPS schools.

New legislation at the state level has expanded the voucher program in Milwaukee to allow private schools outside Milwaukee to participate, while removing all enrollment caps on the program. While the original intent of the voucher program was to provide educational alternatives to low-income students

P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708 • (608) 266-7671 • Fax: (608) 282-3622 • Toll-free: (888) 534-0022 • Email: rep.pasch@legis.wi.gov

who could not afford private school tuition, the new state laws raise the income limits on participants allowing middle-class families to use the publically funded voucher for private schools. Due to these policy changes in the state's 2011-2013 biennial budgets, the cost of the MPCP will rise significantly and likely exceed the state's official 2012 estimate of $53.4 million.

In truth, Milwaukee taxpayers are being billed not only for the largest school district in the state, but also for the sixth largest, which is what the MPCP has grown to be with more than 21,000 students.

It is conceivable that over the next few years, if the program were displayed under the "Levy by Unit of Government" section of the tax bill, the levy for the MPCP could exceed that of Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) and it already exceeds the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) by nearly $10 million.

At a time when our public schools statewide are forced to make do with at least $800 million less in state aid over the next two years, spending on programs, like the MPCP, which levies public dollars for private schools will likely see a net increase of nearly $17 million.

Our city's taxpayers deserve to know which programs are being funded with their tax dollars. This is matter of public accountability, transparency and good government. Again, we respectfully request that you break out and display the tax levy associated with the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program separately from the tax levy for Milwaukee Public Schools on all annual tax documents sent to tax payers.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sen. Chris Larson
7th District

Rep. Sandra Pasch
22nd District

Sen. Tim Carpenter
3rd District

Sen. Lena Taylor
4th District

Sen. Spencer Coggs
10th District

Rep. Jon Richards
19th District

Rep. Christine Sinicki
20th District

Rep. Tamara Grigsby
18th District

Rep. Barbara Toles
17th District

Rep. David Cullen
13th District

Rep. JoCasta Zamarripa
8th District

Rep. Fred Kessler
12th District