



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

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February 13, 2012

**Jeff Fitzgerald- Speaker**

Room 211 West  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

**Bill Kramer- Speaker Pro Tempore**

Room 115 West  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

**Scott Suder- Majority Leader**

Room 215 West  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

**Robin Vos- Co-Chair Joint Finance**

Room 309 East  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Hand-Delivered

Dear Rep. Fitzgerald, Suder, Kramer, and Vos:

We are asking for your leadership in the Assembly to uphold the promises members of your caucus made to close the voucher loophole created in 2011-2013 Biennial Budget.

As you are aware, a provision was adopted in the budget that establishes four criteria for a school district that, if met, would allow private and religious schools to take up to \$6,500 in tax dollars per student enrolled in the program.

The four criteria are listed below:

- The district property value per member is no more than 80% of the statewide average
- The district shared cost per pupil is no more than 91% of the statewide average
- The district is eligible to receive high poverty aid
- The district is located in whole or in part in a second class city

As you are also aware, members of the Republican caucus, including Senator Ellis and Representative Vos, indicated that their intention with these budget provisions was to simply expand the voucher program to Racine alone. During and after the budget debate, Senate and Assembly Republican leaders promised to pass additional legislation to close the voucher loophole created by the budget.

At the time the budget was passed only Racine met the aforementioned criteria and qualified for expansion of the voucher program, but other communities could also qualify in future years if the law stays as it is, forcing other cities to implement their own voucher program. There are currently two districts that are on the verge of becoming "choice eligible"- Green Bay and Menasha - both of whom meet three of four criteria and only miss on the criteria regarding shared cost per pupil (less than 91% of the statewide average). However, both are relatively close, with Green Bay at 93.5% and Menasha at 93.2% of the statewide average this year.

In August, Senator Mike Ellis and Representative Robin Vos introduced Senate Bill 174. This bill closes the voucher loophole by amending the state budget to say that only school districts that have already qualified as an eligible school district may qualify as an eligible school district once Senate Bill 174 is in effect. We believe that the authors of Senate Bill 174 recognized that any expansion of the program should be done through the legislative process where the bill is debated on its merits in a public and transparent way.

Senate Bill 174 received a public hearing in the Senate and Assembly Education Committees this past October. This bipartisan bill has since passed unanimously in the Senate and has waited for several months to be scheduled for a vote in the Assembly.

We are fast approaching the end of the current legislative session and are quickly running out of time to pass Senate Bill 174. Failure to pass this bipartisan bill will diminish the legislature and those who have promised to pass it. You have the commitment of Democrats to work with you to pass this bill.

We urge you - the leaders of the Assembly Republican caucus - to show that you are willing to honor your promises, work in a bipartisan manner for the taxpayers of Wisconsin and schedule this important bill for a vote.

Sincerely,

Chris Larson  
State Senator  
7<sup>th</sup> District

Dave Hansen  
State Senator  
30<sup>th</sup> District

Sandy Pasch  
State Representative  
22<sup>nd</sup> District

Jon Richards  
State Representative  
19<sup>th</sup> District

Tamara Grigsby  
State Representative  
18<sup>th</sup> District

Bob Jauch  
State Senator  
25<sup>th</sup> District

Jess King  
State Senator  
18<sup>th</sup> District

Tim Cullen  
State Senator  
15<sup>th</sup> District

Bob Wirth  
State Senator  
22<sup>nd</sup> District

Kathleen Vinehout  
State Senator  
31<sup>st</sup> District

Gordon Hintz  
State Representative  
54<sup>th</sup> District

Penny Bernard Schaber  
State Representative  
57<sup>th</sup> District

Lena C. Taylor  
State Senator  
4<sup>th</sup> District

Julie Lassa  
State Senator  
24<sup>th</sup> District

Sondy Pope-Roberts  
State Representative  
79<sup>th</sup> District

Andy Jorgenson  
State Representative  
37<sup>th</sup> District

Mark Pocan  
State Representative  
78<sup>th</sup> District

Christine Sinicki  
State Representative  
20<sup>th</sup> District

Fred Kessler  
State Representative  
12<sup>th</sup> District

Louis Molepske Jr.  
State Representative  
71<sup>st</sup> District

Terese Berceau  
State Representative  
76<sup>th</sup> District

Cory Mason  
State Representative  
62<sup>nd</sup> District

Kelda Helen Roys  
State Representative  
81<sup>st</sup> District

Fred Clark  
State Representative  
42<sup>nd</sup> District

Steve Doyle  
State Representative  
94<sup>th</sup> District

Spencer Coggs  
State Senator  
6<sup>th</sup> District