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Statement on Budget's Repeal of Residency

Madison – Today State Senator Tim Carpenter (D-Milwaukee) released the following statement regarding the budget's repeal of residency requirements for local public employees:

“The repeal of residency requirements is a non-fiscal policy item that did not belong in the budget. It was only put in the budget because it has failed to pass as a stand-alone bill for more than 3 decades.

For the vast majority of Milwaukee fire and police union members, the most important employment issues over the years have been salary, health care, pension, and public safety. However, a small but vocal minority of police and fire union members has prioritized repeal of residency.

This politically-connected minority has been frustrated that it could never convince state legislators to violate the conservative principle of local control.

Putting the repeal in the budget, where the majority party requires its members to blindly vote “yes,” was how residency was finally repealed.

Once repealed, however, many public employees for whom residency was not a top priority could now take advantage of it as it would not cost them anything to do so.

Experience in Detroit, Minneapolis, and Baltimore shows that large portions of their public workers have left the city a decade after lifting residency. In Detroit, over 50% of its police left the city after residency was lifted.

Recent estimates indicate that the percentage of city employees residing in Detroit has declined from nearly 70% to 30% after the repeal of residency. In Baltimore, over 77% of its police officers now live outside the city.

Many of the most stable and vibrant neighborhoods in Milwaukee are heavily populated with city employees. These public employees, who comprise the bulk of the middle class, are the backbone of the city's economic vitality. If they leave, the tax base of our city that has already been devastated by thousands of foreclosures and abandoned homes will suffer even further.

The city's taxpayers will be forced to pay the salaries and benefits of those employees who no longer pay property taxes in the city, or contribute economically by patronizing local businesses. The city taxpayers will be forced to pay its taxes to absentee employees who are now free to abandon the city.

Based upon what happened in Detroit, I predict that due to the repeal of residency – and the economic problems that will result from the exodus of middle class public employees – some 50,000 to 100,000 people may leave Milwaukee in the next decade. I hope I'm wrong. We'll see in 10 years.”

Senator Carpenter's press releases are available for review at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/sen03/news>

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