



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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## **Proposed School Referendum Changes Would Devastate Schools**

*By Rep. Gary Hebl*

Several Republican members of the Wisconsin Legislature have circulated a number of bills that are aiming to modify how school referenda operate. One of these bills, [Assembly Bill 282](#), mandates when resolutions calling for referenda can be held. Another, [Assembly Bill 268](#), severely hampers schools' abilities to raise necessary funds. A third, [Assembly Bill 269](#), mandates when school referenda can be on the ballot. This bill package is yet another attack on public schools from the Republican-led legislature, and it will have a devastating impact.

Assembly Bill 282 would require that the resolution calling for a referendum be held at the annual school board meeting. The author's stated goal is to ensure increased public turnout to discuss options. However, fellow member of the Education Committee Representative, Don Vruwink (D-Milton), stated that, as a school board member, it has been his observation that annual school board meetings are, in fact, more sparsely attended than if a special meeting was called specifically for the purpose of discussing a resolution. I have also received emails from constituents that have echoed this sentiment.

Assembly Bill 268 seeks to overhaul recurring referenda. Currently, if local voters approve at the ballot box, schools can be permanently given the option to exceed their revenue limit on a recurring basis. This bill would disallow that, limiting to a length of five years how long school districts might be able to raise revenue limits. The authors of the bill tried to frame recurring referenda as a so-called "forever tax," failing to note that schools simply have the *option* to raise revenue limits, not the *obligation* to increase them. For example, Stoughton schools have had the option to increase their revenue limits since 2014. However, they did not raise their limits in either the 2015-16 or the 2016-17 school years. Having these referenda simply gives the school districts flexibility to cover costs.

These bills unnecessarily curtail local control, continuing a six-year trend of Republicans micromanaging every aspect of state and local government. I stand with the people whom these bills directly impact and have resoundingly come out against these bills – school administrators, school boards, and school districts. They do the work every day, and they know what is best for their schools and their students.

Six years ago, when the disastrous anti-public school law Act 10 went into effect, many Wisconsin citizens were worried that there might not be adequate funding for public schools. In response, Republicans told them that if, after Act 10, their schools were not receiving enough money; they could simply go to referendum to raise the needed funds. Now that schools have ended up depending on those referenda for operational costs, Republicans are going back on their word and schools once again face going forward without the sufficient funds needed to properly serve our school children.

Before Act 10 went into effect, the odds that any given school referendum would pass was about 50/50. Now that Act 10 is law, and public schools are facing challenging budget shortfalls, referenda are being approved between 70-80% of the time. These aren't generally referenda to pay for new school buildings or additions- these are referenda to cover the cost of maintenance. Schools are just trying to keep the lights on, and Republicans in the Legislature are trying to make that more difficult. Ensuring adequate funding of public schools is critically important to our children's future, which is why I plan to vote against these anti-local control, anti-public school bills when and if they come to a Committee vote.

*Rep. Gary Hebl represents the 46<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, which includes the Cities of Sun Prairie and Stoughton, the Village of Cottage Grove, and the Townships of Cottage Grove, Dunkirk, Pleasant Springs, and Sun Prairie.*

Contact Rep. Hebl with any questions or concerns you may have at (608) 266-7678 or via email at [Rep.Hebl@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Rep.Hebl@legis.wi.gov).

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