



Questions and Concerns On State Budget Dominate First JFC Hearing

BRILLION – Representative Gordon Hintz (D-Oshkosh) attended the Joint Finance Committee's public hearing on the state budget at Brillion High School today. Concerns over cuts to K12 education, the expansion of the unaccountable taxpayer funded private voucher program, and a sweeping overhaul of long term care programs for the elderly and disabled were the leading concerns expressed. This hearing was the first of four to be held around the state in the next two weeks.

More than 15 school districts testified on the devastating impact of the budget cuts on class size, teacher retention, and course offerings. School administrators, board members, teachers, and parents asked members of the JFC to reconsider, with statements such as "put kids over cuts" and "look at public education as an investment, not a cost".

Gov. Walker's budget eliminates a \$150 per pupil aid payment that districts received over the past two years, as well as offering no increase in the revenue limit (amount districts can raise in state aid and property taxes combined). The budget also lifts the cap on taxpayer funded private school vouchers and changes their funding structure. Under the budget, public schools will lose money if a student leaves to use a voucher at a private school.

Dr. Michelle Langenfeld, Superintendent of the Green Bay Area Public School District, asked JFC members how she could budget and offer contracts to teachers for next year without knowing the impact vouchers will have on funding and the numbers of students in her district.

Another frequent issue arising at the hearing was sweeping changes to Wisconsin's Long Term Care and IRIS, a self-directed care program. Providers, advocates, and participants testified in opposition, highlighting the importance and effectiveness of current programs, and inquired as to why the change was being made. Advocates and participants also questioned how the transition to a statewide model would take place, and what would replace the current regional organizations, all information the Department of Health Services has not provided.

The next public hearing will take place Friday, March 20th at Alverno College in Milwaukee.

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