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## **Current State Spending For Milwaukee Is Unsustainable Without Changes**

Recent complaints from Milwaukee leaders about their lack of state funding are misguided and lack perspective. One Milwaukee alderman claimed that Milwaukee gets mere “peanuts” in funding. Another Milwaukee leader told state legislators to “leave us alone.” They can’t have it both ways.

In 2015, state taxpayers invested over one BILLION dollars in Milwaukee. That amount does not include Medical Assistance benefits or transportation dollars. If Milwaukee was a single government program, it would be the third largest expenditure in the state, behind K-12 education and Medical Assistance. If you include MA and transportation, that billion dollar amount skyrockets.

Aside from the constant complaints, what do we get for our billion dollar investment? It seems like more costs to state taxpayers.

The \$600 million that the state gives Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has given us a school district where 75% of elementary schools fail to meet expectations, 86% of students aren’t proficient in reading and 93% of students aren’t proficient at math. Two schools had NOBODY proficient in math. This is unacceptable.

MPS has performed so badly for so long that almost 20 years ago, Governor Tommy Thompson proposed the state take it over. The plan didn’t pass, but MPS promised improvement. In 2009, Governor Jim Doyle and Mayor Tom Barrett said that MPS performance was unacceptable, and proposed a mayoral takeover. Again, despite promises, there was little to no improvement. And this year, when a plan to remove the worst performing school from MPS passed, people cried about a takeover, and we have been promised improvement, again.

We cannot lose another generation to the status quo.

The MPS environment is so poisonous and insular, that last month, a qualified, respected, expert volunteer helping to improve MPS quit because of MPS’s unwillingness to accept outside help to solve Milwaukee’s education crisis. Instead, MPS has another improvement proposal and asks for more money. Again.

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The answer is not, and cannot, be more money. That isn't fair to state taxpayers who have spent \$12.5 billion on broken MPS promises since the first takeover was proposed. The answer is not eliminating the school choice program, either. For 25,000 students, that is their ticket out of the MPS quagmire. Does anyone think MPS would miraculously improve if it had the chance to educate those 25,000 choice students? Of course not.

Milwaukee's failing education system robs many students of hope for a productive life. It leads only to two things – poverty and crime. Unfortunately, state taxpayers pick up the lion's share of those costs too.

Milwaukee's poor account for more than one-quarter of the state's medical assistance recipients. Given the poverty rate in Milwaukee, this isn't surprising, but it should be regrettable. That's several hundred million dollars state taxpayers spend giving health care to Milwaukeeans. If Milwaukee's share of MA was roughly equal to its share of population, state taxpayers could invest millions elsewhere – in tax relief, economic development, schools, or roads. Unfortunately, the only way to cut this expenditure is to reduce the number of people needing assistance – reducing poverty. But the failing school system, and Milwaukee's crime problem prevent that.

A person is five times more likely to be the victim of a violent crime in Milwaukee than in the rest of the state. In fact, you're more likely to be the victim of a violent crime in Milwaukee than in 96% of the country. Property crime rates in Milwaukee are more than double the rest of Wisconsin. Milwaukee's murder rate is at a 23-year high. Carjackings and car thefts are a daily occurrence.

But, the mayor says car thieves shouldn't be put into jail until their third offense and police don't pursue the thieves. Violent criminals are released on bail based on their word, or on low cash bail. Light sentences in Milwaukee are the norm, not the exception. Even in this "soft" (now called "smart") on crime environment, over one-third of the state's prison population comes from Milwaukee. No one wants that percentage to increase, but it's a better and safer alternative than having criminals on the street – even if it drives up state costs.

Despite these faults, the Milwaukee area is still the economic driving force of our state. Almost 1/3 of the state's economy takes place in Metro Milwaukee. Parts are a hubbub of activity, with world class attractions, restaurants, and festivals. It attracts visitors, investment, and spending. Cranes and construction are everywhere. Wisconsin needs a healthy Milwaukee so that the state can continue to thrive.

And that's the crux of the issue. Despite the benefit of Milwaukee's people and economy to the state, Milwaukee still jeopardizes the state's fiscal health. That billion-plus dollars could be spent elsewhere, with better results. City leaders need to recognize that state taxpayers have subsidized Milwaukee for a long time, with little result – and we're frustrated. When Milwaukee spends its own money on wants instead of needs, we're baffled. State taxpayers can't keep throwing good money after bad. Milwaukee leaders need to recognize and solve these problems. We need to see improvement in school performance and crime rates. We need results, not promises. Milwaukee's current path jeopardizes the future of the city and the state.