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PROPERTY TAXES FOR VOUCHER SCHOOLS DESERVE SAME SCRUTINY AS OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This fall, Wisconsin voters weighed in on record requests for school referendums. The vast majority were approved, showing again the dedication our friends and neighbors have to supporting students in Wisconsin's public schools.

Unfortunately, unlike the referendum process that is required to increase resources for public schools that have served our families and communities for generations, School Choice operators are able to take more and more from taxpayers without their approval.

According to a recent memo from the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, spending on vouchers has increased by 181.22% since 2010-11. This is more than 18 times faster than net general aid for our public schools.

With annual increases for Choice programs written into state law (unlike public school funding and revenue authority, which are subject to the whims of the majority party in the state budget process every two years and subject to state-imposed caps) are only going to grow with no opportunity for taxpayers to say yes or no.

For the vast majority of taxpayers, that increased cost for voucher operations falls squarely on your property tax bill. Payments to schools in the statewide Choice program (as well as those in a separate Racine program) are financed directly by cuts in general aid to our school districts. Under state revenue caps, less general aid means more reliance on property taxes.

In the current school year, those general aid cuts are \$168 million statewide, including \$8.4 million imposed on taxpayers in the 27th Senate District I'm honored to represent. Worse yet, a plan put forward by many of my Republican colleagues last session – and likely to be revived this session - would increase that burden by over \$577 million, but more on that shortly.

Statewide, regardless of general aid amounts and revenue caps by school district, voucher operations are guaranteed a set payout from taxpayers. 92.1% of school districts in our state (and 100% in the 27th) lose more per voucher student than they receive in general aid in the first



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place. While general aid averages only \$5,994 per student, School Choice operators receive \$8,399 - \$9,045 depending on the student's grade level.

That means you're not only making up the difference, you're making up the difference and then some. This is just one of the reasons the plan the Republicans have touted to remove caps on voucher schools is so dangerous to your home budget.

As the Department of Public Instruction pointed out in a fiscal estimate on the proposal, current private school families could opt for voucher payments from taxpayers instead. With that, the department estimated a staggering \$577 million increase that would land squarely on your property tax bill.

The debate over School Choice will clearly continue in the Capitol. Before adding to your property tax bill, Choice Schools should face the same taxpayer option to say yes or no that we had in district after district this fall.

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