

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, Inc.

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Statement to the Senate Committee on Education in Support of SB 73 Relating to Elimination of School Funding Revenue Caps

May 9, 2001

We support a system of financing public education that promotes equality in educational opportunity for all students. The League opposes the revenue caps because they do not promote equality in funding. Under revenue caps, the inequalities present in 1992-93 actual expenditures per school are maintained because this year is the base for determining each district's cap. Several thousand dollars difference exists between the low and high spending districts. No provision exists under the revenue caps to make up these differences; in fact, low spending districts are prohibited from making up these differences. Additionally, there is no flexibility to adjust for changes in the type of students attending our schools. Some districts have increasing populations of special needs students or more bilingual students than seven years ago. There is no adjustment for the higher cost of educating these students are not under the revenue caps.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin also supports local control of school program and personnel by the local school district. The League opposes the revenue caps because they diminish local control. The local school decision makers must make program funding decisions based on whether the costs fit under the revenue caps rather than what is best for their students. Therefore, they may decide to fund new textbooks but not needed technology, or fund building repairs rather than providing needed staff development. With revenue caps, these decisions are made because of a state law rather than the need of local school districts.

The League urges the legislature to abolish revenue caps to allow for greater equality among school districts in Wisconsin and to give school districts more flexibility in meeting the educational needs of their students.

LWWWI Legislative Committee contact: Dottie Juengst, 414/469-1919 or Dorothy Wheeler, 608/244-4711



INSTITUTE FOR WISCONSIN'S FUTURE

policy research in the public interest

May 9, 2001

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Testimony before Senate Education Committee

Chairman Grobschmidt and members of the Senate Education Committee—thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Tom Beebe and I am a school funding outreach specialist with the Institute for Wisconsin's Future.

For months you have been hearing from your constituents—from teachers, administrators, students, parents, and taxpayers—about the problems caused by Wisconsin's school funding system, specifically revenue limits.

You've heard about:

- Building maintenance and repairs that have been delayed;
- Teachers who have been laid off;
- Programs that have been eliminated;
- Technology that is lagging;
- Spiraling educational costs in the face of severely limited revenue;
- Declining enrollment;
- Underfunded programs for special-needs students; and
- Futures that have been diminished for many of Wisconsin's public school students.

Other than this list, I'm don't want to discuss the problems because now you have moved to consideration of the solutions. That's the "good news." The "bad news" is that all of the legislation you are considering today merely puts Band-Aids on a badly bleeding wound.

In the long run, you must start talking about reforming the system. The Institute for Wisconsin's Future, however, realizes that isn't going to happen soon. Therefore, it is imperative that we provide relief this budget cycle to our public schools.

The Institute for Wisconsin's Future favors increased funding and flexibility under revenue limits for all school districts. For that reason, we would support five of the bills you are considering—unless there is a better option ... an option that is better for districts and, more importantly, for children.

- IWF supports Senate Bill 4 to increase caps for school breakfast and lunch programs, but we realize it won't help all districts.
- IWF supports Senate Bill 120 to increase caps for school security measures, but we realize it won't help all districts.

- IWF supports Senate Bill 124 to increase caps for increases in health insurance costs, but we realize it won't help all districts.
- IWF supports Senate Bill 149 to exclude certain debt-service costs from the formula, but we also realize that bill won't help all districts.
- IWF supports Senate Bill 73 to eliminate revenue limits, but we realize its political outlook is rather dim.

IWF can't, however, support Senate Bill 153 to increase the revenue limit by 1% of the statewide average spending per pupil because it is unaided and relies strictly on local property taxes. That reliance on property taxes makes this bill extremely disequalizing under the school aid formula. We feel that only property wealthy districts will be able to afford the additional taxation, while the tax effort of property poor districts will be so prohibitive that it is likely many would not even take advantage of the new revenue generating authority.

For all of those reasons, IWF—along with other groups vitally interested about our public school children—supports that “better solution” I talked about earlier. This coalition—which consists of the Wisconsin PTA; the School Administrators' Alliance; WEAC; the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers; the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy; and the school districts of Janesville, Madison, and Milwaukee—supports:

- Full funding of the state's commitment to SAGE;
- Increased funding for programs for special-needs students; and
- A 1-% solution that is funded as part of the general equalization aids formula.

The 1%-plan we favor gives school boards the authority to exceed revenue caps by up to 1% of the state per-pupil allowable spending average that was, in FY02, about \$75 per pupil.

At the option of the district, the additional revenue would be considered partial school revenue. The effect of counting it as partial school revenue would be to increase the state's general equalization aid pool by two-thirds of the additional amount of spending. Districts that use this option would then receive additional state aid on their extra revenue.

It is estimated that an additional \$42 million in general purpose revenue would be required in the first year of the biennium if all 426 districts took advantage of the plan.

IWF thinks the aided alternative is important because of its effect on the state's poorest school districts. For example, in the poorest quarter of districts—as measured by property value per member (below \$215,000)—the effect of a 1%-unaided increase would result in an average levy increase of 4.1% or an additional half a mil.

On the other hand, the richest quarter of districts—again, as measured by property value per member (above \$360,000)—the effect of a 1%-unaided increase in property taxes would result in an average levy increase of only 1.5% or an additional one-sixth of a mil.

The net effect is to widen the disparity between Wisconsin's richest and poorest school districts, and most importantly, it widens the learning gap between the children who live in them. The richest districts currently have mil rates about one-half mil lower than the poorest—a discrepancy an unaided 1% solution would increase to three-quarters of a mil.

The impact would be especially hard on Milwaukee, which already faces a structural deficit of between \$4 and \$14 million. MPS would have to increase its levy by 4.5% to use an unaided 1% solution.

As I said, if there were no alternatives, the Institute for Wisconsin's Future could support five of the bills you are considering today. There is, however, a better solution—a 1%-solution that helps all school districts regardless of their property wealth or lack of it.

Again, thank you so much for your time today. The work you are doing is critically important to the public school children of Wisconsin, and I applaud your efforts.

Thomas S. Beebe
Outreach Specialist, School Funding Project
Institute for Wisconsin's Future
315 Maple Street
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538

WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Every kid
deserves a
Great School!*

**Testimony to Senate Education Committee
By Terry Craney, President
Wisconsin Education Association Council
May 9, 2001**

Thank you chairperson Grobschmidt and members of the Senate Education Committee for this opportunity to speak today. My name is Terry Craney. I am the President of the Wisconsin Education Association Council. I would like to begin by stating that WEAC and the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers support many of the bills selected for public hearing today.

- SB 4 relating to school breakfast or lunch programs and SB 120 relating to school security measures are both part of the WEAC 2001-2002 Legislative Agenda.
- SB 124 as amended would help districts endure recent increases in health insurance costs.
- Two of the other bills, SB 149 and SB 153, attempt to provide flexibility to local school districts under certain circumstances.
- SB 73 represents an outright repeal of revenue caps and a new way to fund 2/3 of school operation costs.

WEAC would like to thank all the legislators who have authored and co-sponsored the bills before you today. While our organization generally supports nearly every bill that seeks additional flexibility to revenue caps, we are committed to the eventual full repeal of this law.

Every year since 1993 the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) and the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) have jointly surveyed the state's school superintendents to assess the impact state-imposed revenue controls are having on our children's education. I find the hard numbers in the survey hard to swallow. But they confirm everything I have been hearing from teachers, parents and school administrators all over the state about the difficulty of maintaining our excellence under the state regulations.

Terry Craney, President
Michael A. Butera, Executive Director

State-imposed revenue controls are inflicting serious harm upon children, schools and the quality of education in school districts throughout Wisconsin. The WEAC/Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators annual survey of school superintendents found that revenue controls are forcing districts to make choices that decrease the quality of education.

“We are doing our leaders of tomorrow a disservice,” said one administrator. According to the statewide survey, 62% of school administrators believe the consequences of state-imposed revenue controls on the quality of education have been negative or very negative. Nearly 70% predict the quality of education in their districts will decline by 2005.

Educators have been warning for years that revenue controls will force districts to make cuts that harm the quality of education children receive. This survey is absolute proof: administrators themselves say children are being hurt. It is time to end this destructive law.

The seventh annual survey found that revenue controls are forcing districts to:

- Continue to delay or spend less on maintenance of their buildings and grounds (65.9%)
- Delay or reduce the purchase of computers and other technology (67.3%)
- Increase class sizes (49.8%)
- Increase student fees (55.7%)
- Use their fund balance to support the budget (53.1%).
- Districts with declining enrollments report more serious problems than districts with increasing numbers of students.

Enough is enough. The facts are in and the evidence is irrefutable: revenue controls are harming children and the high quality of education in Wisconsin. Every child deserves to be in a classroom that works with a trained and qualified teacher. Great schools benefit our entire state, and every state resident should join the call to end revenue controls.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today.



4797 Hayes Road, Suite 102, Madison WI 53704
608-244-1455 fax 608-244-4785 wl_office@pta.org

DATE: May 8, 2001
TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee
FROM: Winnie Doxsie, Wisconsin PTA President
RE: Education Funding Proposals

I regret that Wisconsin PTA will not be represented at the hearing in person, but our pool of volunteers were all unavailable today. Please accept this written testimony.

Wisconsin PTA believes that the current school funding under the revenue limits is inadequate. We don't see any of the proposals offered to this point as anything but short-term fixes or band-aids. We would encourage you to consider a global review of education funding in Wisconsin looking to create a funding system that adequately funds schools for all children.

With the above statement in mind we would support:

SB - 4 *To increase school district revenue limit by amounts spent to initiate a school breakfast or lunch program.* Many of our children come to school hungry; a meal is as critical a learning resource as any of the educational opportunities they won't notice if hungry.

SB - 120 *To increase district revenue limit by amount spent for school security measures.* School districts shouldn't have to choose between a school safety office or practice and an opportunity to learn.

SB - 124 *Increases revenue limits for increases in health insurance costs.* We are already seeing staff positions cut because of insurance and / or energy costs that are increasing dramatically. Again I encourage you to help districts with some flexibility to keep programs while you look for a long-term solution.

We would oppose SB - 73, not because we like revenue limits - but rather because this type of "solution" will still leave many funding problems. We encourage a thoughtful process where the balance of taxpayer needs and the responsibility to provide an adequate education to all children are considered and addressed.

Wisconsin has a tradition of sound education for our children. After hearing 14 hours of testimony around the state last fall I am convinced that we have the obligation to help all the children get an education that will enable them to compete nationally and globally - we aren't doing that right now.

I am also attaching my testimony before the Joint Finance Committee on April 11, 2001 for your information.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Winnie Doxsie".



4797 Hayes Road, Suite 102, Madison WI 53704
 608-244-1455 fax 608-244-4785 wi_office@pta.org

DATE: April 11, 2001
 TO: Honorable Members of the Joint Finance Committee
 FROM: Winnie Doxsie, Wisconsin PTA President
 RE: Education proposals in the 2001-2003 Budget

On behalf of the over 45,000 members of Wisconsin PTA I am expressing our deep concern about several issues in the current 2001-2003 budget proposal. I will group our concerns into 5 areas;

1. Revenue Limits and associated funding problems
2. Appropriate funding for programs such as SAGE and Special Education.
3. Diversion of public funds from public schools for the expansion vouchers
4. Support for quality teacher licensure
5. The Board of Education and Accountability

Revenue Limits

Wisconsin PTA believes that the current funding under the revenue limits is inadequate and finds the current budget proposal that further limit revenue for schools districts by eliminating the annual inflationary adjustment unacceptable.

In September and October I was a member of six panels that heard testimony around the state about the negative impacts of revenue limits on our school districts. On January 24, the capitol smelled like brownies as over 600 parents and community members representing over 50 groups and school districts came to share our concerns. We brought over 200 dozen brownies to the capitol demonstrating our concern and the futility of using fundraisers to make up budget deficits. Revenue limits are hurting our children – not “the district” OUR CHILDREN and selling brownies won’t touch the problem. We need to increase money for schools not further limit it!

Problems that need addressed in the short term:

- Give school districts relief under revenue limits.
- Provide help for districts with declining enrollment.
- Provide help for districts with fixed costs that are rising so dramatically. How can a district provide a quality educational program when they are limited to less than 4% increase and fuel cost triple or insurance costs go up thirty percent?

I encourage you to look at the real cost of educating a child – not a state average number. One example of what I mean is this; school districts in the northern part of our state spend a lot of money transporting children to and from school, a much greater percentage of the education dollar than a relatively compact district in the southeast part of the state. Assuming all other factors were equal, which they are not, the southeastern children have more money available per pupil for direct instruction than those up north who spend hours each week on the bus.

Our school districts need and our children deserve immediate relief and I encourage you to find ways to provide some.

I have one final comment on revenue limits. Anything that will be passed in this budget will be appreciated but Wisconsin PTA believes that this problem will not go away without some serious change in the way we currently fund schools and I ask you to commit to looking for a long term solution.

(Attached to this testimony is a report I gave to the Wisconsin PTA Board of Directors in October 2000 after I completed listening to the 6 hearings on the impact of revenue limits that were held around the state. I am including it so that you will have the opportunity to see the reactions of a volunteer mom, who is lucky enough to be the President of Wisconsin PTA. Listening to the problems our schools are having was difficult, troubling and the very real to me.)

Appropriate funding for programs.

SAGE is a program that should be expanded not cut back. We know that SAGE helps children achieve, I encourage you to find money to fund SAGE. We need to *invest* in the future of our children – an investment now to help a young child succeed will more than pay for itself when that young person is reading and able to succeed in school rather than becoming frustrated and dropping out with a limited future.

Birth – 3 Program is another service that helps catch problems early and gets our youngest children with special needs the attention they need to grow and meet their full potential. This program has not seen a funding cut, rather the criteria for service has been raised, leaving “marginal” (that really aren’t) children without services that they would greatly benefit from. Again, we are cutting off our noses to spite our faces; a relatively small investment now will reap great benefits later. Please look at this policy change and *restore* eligibility to the current level.

Special Education WI PTA *recommends* that the state budget proposal be amended to include sufficient funds to reimburse school districts for 50% of special education costs. In addition, WI PTA *recommends* that local school districts be reimbursed at a higher rate when they have children whose special education costs are extraordinary. For these “high-cost” students the reimbursement should be 90% of the costs of services that exceeds three times the state average cost per student.

Diversion of public funds from public schools for the expansion vouchers

Wisconsin PTA is steadfast in our opposition to any public funds being diverted from public schools. The Milwaukee School Choice Program does nothing to address the needs of all children in Milwaukee; instead it drains money away from every school district in this state to give money to private ventures that are not even held accountable or to the same standards as our public school system.

We would *support* legislation mandating that ALL schools receiving public tax dollars are held to the same standards, assessments hiring practices and data reporting.

We *oppose* any increase in the voucher program.

We *propose* using the \$36.3 million slated for increasing the voucher program be used to fully fund the proven SAGE program, expanding it to 2nd and 3rd grades, which would cost \$36.9 million.

Support for quality Teacher Licensure

Wisconsin PTA advocates for the maintenance of high quality teacher education and certification requirements that include; subject matter preparation, design of instruction, the art of teaching and teacher training in Parent Involvement Skills. The current budget proposals do not appear to meet these criteria. Any teacher receiving a temporary license must be required to complete the necessary training to acquire the skills that will enable them to deliver a standard of teaching quality expected of regularly licensed teachers. We *oppose* the budget proposal that weakens the standard for licensing our children's educators.

The Board of Education and Accountability

Wisconsin PTA *opposes* moving oversight for educational programs from the Department of Public Instruction. A politically appointed "Board" is not the best interest of our children; we need to work to keep political appointments out of education. The Department of Public Instruction, headed by an independently elected superintendent of Public Instruction, has the resources and skilled individuals to support education in Wisconsin. We need to keep all services and resources related to education in Wisconsin in one department, the Department of Public Instruction.

Fund the Department of Public Instruction

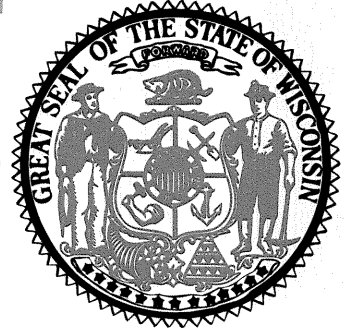
The Department of Public Instruction functions as a resource and leader for many programs that help our children. There are many services I am personally experienced with but I would point out one - the importance of DPI in working for increased parent involvement. Research proves that schools with meaningful parent involvement show increase student achievement. Please keep DPI funded so it will continue to be educational lead organization we need in Wisconsin.

Policy in the Budget

In general we find the practice of "hiding" policy changes in the budget document offensive and disrespectful. Proposals such as when a school district may hold a referendum or if school will be held on a certain date have no place in a budget bill. We urge removal of policy items from the budget document so they may be considered on their own merit.

I would be happy to expand on any of these remarks and or assist in any way. Our children are 10% of our present and 100% of our future. I encourage you to invest in them now.

APR 16 2001



FRED A. RISSER
President
Wisconsin State Senate

April 16, 2001

Senator Rick Grobschmidt, Chair
Senate Committee on Education
104 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Grobschmidt,


I am writing to urge the Senate Committee on Education to schedule Senate Bill 73 for a public hearing.

Senate Bill 73 relates to the elimination of school district revenue limits. In addition to repealing the revenue limits, Senate Bill 73 will end the state commitment to 2/3 funding of public education and instead provide a sum certain that will result in an increase in general school aids. To approximate the level of funding that has generally been needed to maintain the 2/3 commitment in the past, this proposal will provide a total increase of \$600 Million GPR over a two year period.

At a hearing held by the Senate Committee on Education on January 24, 2001, over 60 people from around the state registered or spoke in opposition to the revenue limits. Only one person spoke in favor of the current system. It is clear that the people of Wisconsin are looking for an alternative way to fund our public education system. Senate Bill 73 is a very good way to start the dialogue.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. If you should need any further information on Senate Bill 73, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Most Sincerely,


FRED A. RISSER
President
Wisconsin State Senate

FAR:skb
CC: Members of Senate Committee on Education

January 24, 2001
Senate Education Committee
Public Hearing on Revenue Caps

Registering against revenue caps:

- Sheila Schulz, (Ashland)
- Joel Lamke (Racine)
- Brenda Ray (Wauwatosa)
- Kay Lorenzen, Washington Elementary PTA (Wauwatosa)
- Nikki Beckwith, Longellow PTA – Wauwatosa PTA Council
- Mark Van Der Zee, Menasha Joint School District
- Jean S. Burns, WI Alliance for Arts Education
- Amada Zamudio, MPS
- Kenneth Edwards, MPS
- Arlandus Morton, MPS
- Dr. Bambi Statz (Dane)
- J. Michael Thompson, Menasha Jt. School District
- Suzanne Wolffersdorff, Friends of Greendale Schools
- Brian Hanes, Superintendent School District of Oostburg
- Deborah C. Thomas, WI Allied for Arts in Education
- Thomas Wild, Riverside – MPS
- Lance Alwin, united school District of Antigo
- Skye Alwin, Antigo USD
- Caroloyne Krebs, Janesville Schools
- Mike Rundle, (Janesville)
- John Enster (Edgerton)
- Lori Zahorodny (Milwaukee)
- Dierdre Goldberg, Janesville Education Association
- Rebecca Spice (Milwaukee)
- Susan Becicer, WI AAUW
- Gail Kolvenbach (St. Francis)
- David Arbuthut, Janesville Legislative Committee
- Dewitt Jones, Fond du Lac Schools
- Helen Gillet, WI Alliance for Arts Education
- Virgilyn Driscoll, WI Alliance for Arts Education
- M. Rosales, MPS
- Wendy Cates, (Milwaukee)
- Guy Costello, So. Milw. Education Assoc.
- Barkley Anderson, Edgar Public Schools
- A. Vernon Jensen, Preserve Our Public Schools
- Janet Van Asten (West Bend)
- David North (Coldgate)
- Pat Herdrich, WI Association for Supervision & Curriculum Directors
- Janet Van Asten (Appleton)
- Laurie Casey (Wauwatosa)
- Thomas Wolfe (Janesville)
- Marquise Roberson-Best (Milwaukee)
- Kathy Zingsheim (West Allis – West Milwaukee)
- Michael O'Meara (Stevens Point)

Speaking Against Revenue Caps

- Winnie Doxie, WI PTA
- Sandra Sulger, Madison student
- Jordan Woods-Wahl, Superior Student
- Katie Shanovich, Riverside University HS
- Brianna Sanford, Antigo Student
- Rachael Cunningham, Antigo Student
- Virginia Wyss, (Janesville)

- Jan Brill, (Superior)
- Carol Carstensen (Madison)
- Donna Spotts (Ashland)
- Robert Kattman, District Administrator Glendale –River Hills School District
- Bill Hettler, Central WI Forum (Stevens Point)
- Marty Holmquist (Cassville)
- William Marris (West Allis)
- Richard Meyer (Appleton)
- Richelle Ridgeway (Green Bay)
- Roxanne Starks (Milwaukee)
- Margaret Vranes (Greendale)
- Doris Parsons (Palmyra)
- Judy Fons (Greendale)
- Rachel Takniut , Advocates for Education
- Linda Kunelius, Northland Pines School District
- Debora Anderson, Milw. German Immersion School

Speaking in Favor of Revenue Caps

- Michael Birkle, WI Property Taxpayers, Inc.