

WISCONSIN STATE  
LEGISLATURE  
COMMITTEE HEARING  
RECORDS

**2005-06**

(session year)

**Senate**

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

**Committee on  
Education  
(SC-Ed)**

File Naming Example:

Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

- > 05hr\_AC-Ed\_RCP\_pt01a
- > 05hr\_AC-Ed\_RCP\_pt01b
- > 05hr\_AC-Ed\_RCP\_pt02

*Published Documents*

> Committee Hearings ... CH (Public Hearing Announcements)

> \*\*

> Committee Reports ... CR

> \*\*

> Executive Sessions ... ES

> \*\*

> Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

> \*\*

*Information Collected For Or  
Against Proposal*

> Appointments ... Appt

> \*\*

> Clearinghouse Rules ... CRule

\*\*

> Hearing Records ... HR (bills and resolutions)

> **05hr\_sb0514\_SC-Ed\_pt01**

> Miscellaneous ... Misc

> \*\*

## Hogan, Rebecca

---

**From:** Larry and Diane Kahlscheuer [lkahlsch@itol.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 28, 2006 2:27 PM  
**To:** Hogan, Rebecca; Van Ess, Thomas; Rep.Bies  
**Subject:** Second try----sorry

To: Senator Luther Olsen Chair of the Senate Education Committee  
From: Larry and Diane Kahlscheuer  
Reason: SB514

Senator Olsen it has been a few years since I last spoke to you concerning Education in the state of Wisconsin. I have been a resident of Washington Island since September of 1987. I was a 15-year member of the Island School Board 12 of which I served as President. During this same time, I served on the Professional Standards Council dealing with the development and implementation of PI 34. My wife Diane and I have three children, two of who have graduated from Washington Island school.

Our daughter Samantha attends UW-Oshkosh, which is also my alma mater, and our son Matthew is a second semester freshman at St. Norbert College, making the dean's list his first semester. Our youngest son Daniel is a freshman at Washington Island school. The education received by our children is of great importance for Diane and me.

My years on the school board began before the era of the cap/geo so I have an understanding of both sides of the remedies offered for school finance. Our community has for many years, been served by enlightened legislators who understand the complexities of not only school finance but also making education work on an Island. I have been proud of the Island school and serving on its school board. When I moved to the Island the student enrollment was 86 students and by the mid 1990's peaked to a high of 123 students. Since that time enrollment has been declining and is presently at 98. Creatively earning a living on the Island is difficult as the economy is primarily tourism and/or service industry. Economic development is always an issue here and having a good school is primary when trying to attract young families to our community. I have been a part of interview teams searching for a doctor for the Island. Candidates who were family oriented always asked about the school on the Island. It is important to maintain a good community school. The makeup of the school is different than most schools in the state.

Classes are combined and space is utilized with efficiency. Kindergarten is taught separately using a part time staff member in the afternoon.

This instructor does come in for a time in the morning to assist the elementary area with reading. First and second are in one class as are third and fourth, fifth and sixth and seventh and eighth. In the high school end, freshman and sophomores are together as are juniors and seniors. The result is that our teachers by necessity slant their curricula to reach both ages and grades and in some cases are certified to teach multiple subjects. It may sound confusing but it works. It works because the community supports the school in both spirit and finance.

However, the finance end is getting harder each year. Tourism is down, construction of new homes is slowing down making earning a living is difficult. State finance formulas makes the amount of our school receives less each year and the amount the community must support rise.

On paper, the Island looks rich because of property value but this is not shared on the average annual income side of the ledger. The need to levy over the cap is growing faster than local incomes and that puts a strain on everyone each time the school asks for referenda monies. SB514 would go far in helping this small school: the smallest K-12 in the state.

I have worked with four administrators over the years and a number of very fine board members. They have all worked cooperatively along with the community to provide the best possible education to the Island children. We have looked at a variety of ways that the Island school could work collectively with other schools for services and do have a few 66.30 agreements. Six miles of water do not allow for much in the way of pooling resources. Island organizations have stepped up to help the school offer music programs such as BRAVO and what we call Music in the School. Our local Island drama group works with students to create stage experiences for our students. Still others have offered a variety of scholarships to our graduates. The Board/community has worked to spend efficiently and conservatively on our children's education experiences. The time has come to ask for help and legislators like Gary and Alan are bringing our cause to you for your consideration and passage. This legislation is not the end all as state wide revision is

sorely needed for our schools but it would help sustain our school until that day comes. Without 514, if the next referendum fails totally, the resulting damage will not only be to the school but to the community as well. The cuts in staffing, academic offerings and extra curricular activities that result, would force some parents to take or send their children elsewhere to school. This may sound dramatic but it has been a topic of discussion at our dinner table with our 14-year-old son. My wife and I have worked with our two older children filling out college application forms and scholarship forms so we have an understanding of the questions asked on each form. The emphasis on extra curricular and academic activities would not be sufficient (we are already at a bare bone level) to allow us, in good conscience, to have our son remain in school here. Due to financial issues, we could probably not be able to move as a family so boarding him with friends would be the only option since the ferry schedule does not run enough trips during the school year to allow students to be transported on and off the island on a daily basis.

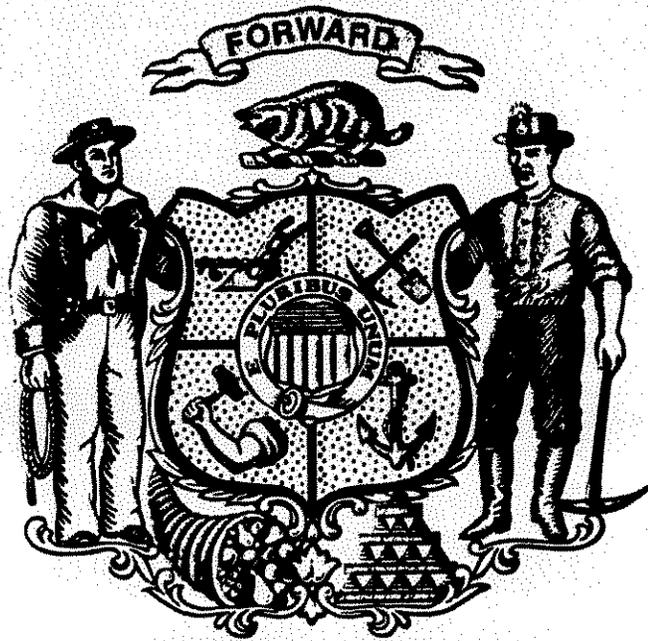
Yes, there is an interactive classroom on the Island but those services are not free and would multiply the financial hardship of the school.

Even an expanded ferry schedule could not in many months allow for the participation in after school activities and when weather prohibits travel by water students would be stranded. I have talked to other parents who may be in the same position. I hope the need to make that decision does not occur.

I am trying to paint a realistic picture of Island life. Unless you have experienced life here, it is not easy to understand its needs. It is a wonderful place to live and raise a family. There is community pride in the school, its students and the way of life here. Our students who have gone on to school have done well.

We are in a desperate situation here with if families are forced to move. Washington Island School and its children are a major lifeline to this community. We are pleading with you to pass this bill to help ease our burden due to our unique circumstances.

Larry and Diane Kahlscheuer



# Washington Island School

Route 1, Box 2

Washington Island, Wisconsin 54246

Phone: 920-847-2507 Fax: 920-847-2865 Email: schurchi@island.k12.wi.us

Dr. Susan Churchill-Chastan, District Administrator

## Hearing on Senate Bill 514

March 1, 2006

To: Senator Luther Olsen, Chair, Education Committee  
Senator Alberta Darling  
Senator Sheila Harsdorf  
Senator Glenn Grothman  
Senator Robert Jauch  
Senator Jon Erpenbach  
Senator Dave Hansen

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak about Senate Bill 514.

My name is Susan Churchill-Chastan, and I am the District Administrator of the School District of Washington on Washington Island. I have been here for the past seven years and I am strongly in favor of this bill.

I'd like to begin by telling you a little bit about our school.

We currently have 98 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. We have 11 teachers, two of whom are part-time; and one guidance counselor who is also our Title I teacher. We have two grades in each classroom in grades 1 - 8. Our high school staff teaches as many as six different classes each day, often in two different departments. For example, Mr. Rose teaches our high school Math and Science, the only teacher in both departments. Mr. Hokkanen teaches both Art and Physical Education to students in grades 1 - 12. One of our part-time teachers, Mrs. Nehlsen, teaches all the high school English, History and Government classes. Sra. O'Connell teaches Spanish to junior high and high school students, and Mr. Clayton teaches Technology Education in grades 7 - 12.

Our budget is very conservative, with many cuts made since the revenue caps were initiated. We have cut instructional supplies and materials; teacher, administrator and school board professional development; one of our two buses; teacher aides; equipment including computers; some of our extra-curricular activities; and field trips. We have no fund balance from which to draw.

We offer our students a good, basic education. In spite of the small number of electives and extra curricular activities, our students are accepted into colleges and universities and are often on the Dean's lists. This year we have students who have been accepted at UW Madison, UW Stevens Point, UW Milwaukee, St. Norbert College, University of Minnesota, Lawrence University, DePaul University, Hillsdale College, UW Marathon, and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College in Green Bay. We have a 100% graduation rate, and have had this for many years.

**Committed to Excellence**

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, we will be asking the voters to approve a \$234,500 cost override referendum. This will cover our operating costs, and allow us to hire a business education / computer literacy teacher. We currently don't have one.

Washington Island School has had to go to a referendum every other year since the inception of revenue caps in 1993. Each one has been larger than the last because of declining enrollment and the state funding formula. Eventually they have passed, with one needing to go back a second time. But the margin of success has been very slight. The last one passed by a vote of 229 to 199. The referendum in April will be the largest amount we have ever had to ask the electors to approve. So passage of this referendum is definitely not a sure thing.

Only 5% of our budget this year came from the state. As a "property rich" district we get no equalization aid, and will receive only \$13,984 in special adjustment aid in June. About 6% of our budget comes from federal sources. The rest comes from the taxpayers. Our revenue limit this year is \$1,100,002 with a total budget of \$1,276,353. This includes a referendum amount of \$140,000. Next year, without a referendum, our revenue limit will be \$958,622 — less than we had in 1999.

The Island is a community of retirees on fixed incomes, and people who are under-employed, working multiple jobs in the summer in the tourism-related and service industries to support their families for the rest of the year. Many families don't have health insurance. The burden of their taxes is becoming an extreme hardship. Almost half a million dollars is sent off the Island to the Technical College system. And we have to ask the taxpayers for more money to keep our school going. How much longer can they do this?

If this referendum fails, the future of Washington Island School is in jeopardy. Drastic cuts will have to be made to our budget.

If the referendum fails, the Board of Education will be looking at staffing, because there is very little else left to cut. What happens when we have to cut teachers? Will we have 3 grades per classroom in the elementary school? Will we lose whole departments in high school? If that happens, will our students be accepted into the colleges and universities of their choice? Will our students be prepared for the workforce? Washington Island students are expected to meet the same academic standards and excellence in testing as any other student in Wisconsin. Will we be able to do that?

Washington Island School is the heart of the Island. If this school fails, the Island economy is in serious trouble. Families will leave the Island. There will be fewer people to work in Island businesses and fewer people to support those businesses. Families with children won't move to the Island, and exiting families will have a harder time selling their homes.

Senate Bill 514 will offer Washington Island taxpayers much needed relief. It will help to keep our school alive.

You may ask why you should support this bill—a bill that only affects a "school district completely surrounded by water." That's us—Washington Island School. But those words "completely surrounded by water" also contain the answer. The six miles of water that separate us from the mainland also limit our options. When the Florence County

School District was in danger of closing because of a failed referendum, they were going to have to send their students to neighboring districts. We can't do that. We have to travel by ferry when we leave the Island. And the ferry schedules are not set up to get our students to school off-Island. Even if they set up new schedules to accommodate transporting students to a mainland school, would parents put their children on the ferry every day to go to school? Would you send a kindergartener or primary student on the ferry every morning, early enough to get to school on the mainland? I don't think so. Many families would move.

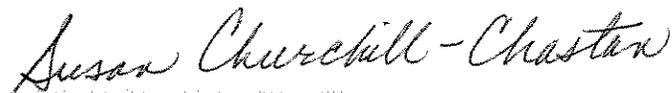
This school district completely surrounded by water is unique in many ways, and we need a unique solution for the financial problems that plague this community.

Senate Bill 514 can be that unique solution. It won't completely eliminate the need for referenda, but it will make it manageable for the taxpayers. The amount of future referenda will be significantly reduced. And Washington Island School will not go down the same road that Florence County Schools did.

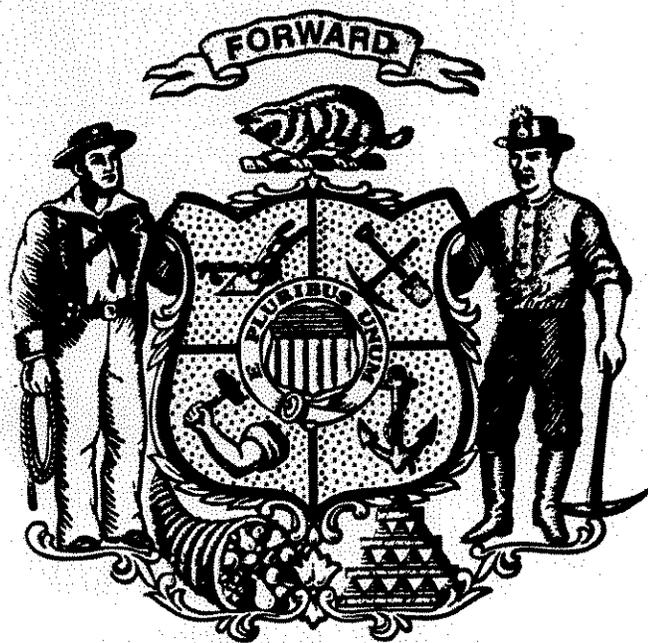
I'm here today to ask you to send Senate Bill 514 out of committee with your strongest recommendation for passage. The children and the community of Washington Island need your help.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Churchill-Chastan".

Susan Churchill-Chastan, Ed.D.  
District Administrator





**Written Testimony of Representative Garey Bies  
Senate Committee on Education  
Senate Bill 514 – Aid to School District Surrounded by Water**

Chairman Olsen and fellow Committee members, I appreciate the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of Senate Bill 514, relating to providing state aid to a school district completely surrounded by water.

Senate Bill 514 is drafted to provide additional state aid to the community of Washington Island in Door County. Due to its geographical location, Washington Island has its own, unique characteristics. Home first to Native Americans, the Town of Washington Island was organized in 1850 and is also home to the second oldest Icelandic Community in the country. Many of the original settling families still have descendants on the island today. While the island fosters a tight, friendly community, what gives the island its wonderful charm, also produces significant hardships for the island.

Because of its location, 6 miles from the mainland of Door County, Washington Island faces few opportunities for growth, Washington Island will never be an industry center. The only opportunity for growth on the island is as a tourism destination and location for vacation homes. Indeed Washington Island is a beautiful place, and as more and more people seek to own a piece of the island for their vacation getaways, two negative consequences have developed for the school district: 1) Property values have soared, causing the school district to become what is a zero-aid school district; and 2) Year-round residents have either been forced to sell their property or have chosen to sell their property and moved away.

Washington Island is not the only school district in the state that has high property values coupled with low per capita income of the full time residents, but it takes this combination to the extreme. There is little opportunity for high-paying jobs on the island where even the Department of Natural Resources is on a land-buying spree! Full time residents are faced with exorbitant property tax bills while receiving no aid from the state. With stagnant population levels for full time residents, and even declining enrollment in the schools, the burden of funding for the Washington Island School District has led to sub-standard facilities at best. Any effort to improve the facilities receives no assistance from the state unlike in other districts where the state can provide significant funding for new building projects.

While the children of Washington Island go to school in a facility that would take you back in time 40 years, the students at schools like Bayport High School go to a modern facility that had a price tag of over \$37 million. When the students on Washington Island see schools like that, don't tell them it is equal education. How much of the tax dollars from Washington Island went to help pay for Bayport High? What benefit does the Island get for this? Much the same benefit they get for watching an

*First for Wisconsin!*

additional half million dollars go to the Technical College System. If only the people of Washington Island could use that money for their own schools.

The current school funding system is not perfect, that we all know. However, a better system has yet to be devised. Washington Island is a district that has fallen through the cracks and due to its unique situation as I have described, I believe this legislation to provide what is a modest amount of additional aid to a district in dire need, is well warranted.

I respectfully request your support of SB 514 in committee. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.