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AB 332 Testimony

Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the Education Committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on AB 332. This bill is a non-political technical fix that seeks to rectify an unintended consequence of changes made to the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program in the most recent state budget.

For the past two years, the 1 percent district cap for the choice program only applied to students who transferred out of public schools. However, with the recent modifications passed by the state Legislature, the 1 percent limit now applies to ALL students who reside in the district, including those who attend public schools.

Because of this change in the definition of the state's pupil participation limit, close to a dozen students who were part of the statewide school choice program last year are expected to lose their vouchers – and thus their places in their respective schools.

These children are still enrolling with their former choice schools this year, but they're only being admitted under the impression the state will fix the inadvertent fallout from the changes to the pupil participation limit.

Our plan to resolve this problem is AB 332, which allows a student to attend a private school in the statewide parental choice program if their application is not accepted due to the resident school district exceeding its pupil participation limit. But in order to be granted this exception, the student must have attended a private school in the statewide parental choice program in the previous year.

While both School Choice Wisconsin and the state Department of Public Instruction agree that AB 332 will fix this technical problem, I realize not everyone supports the expansion of the school choice program. My hope is that we can put aside those differences and focus on the real issue here: If we don't act in a timely fashion, a small group of students will be thrown out of their schools midyear, which could have a devastating effect on their education.

Make no mistake, we are not trying to hide anything by moving on this quickly. School Choice Wisconsin was notified of the situation only last month, and DPI says the students need to be enrolled in their respective private schools for the third Friday count date in order to be eligible.



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DPI has also suggested that legislation should be passed as soon as possible to ensure the appropriate choice schools are correctly paid for these students. Since the funding has already been allocated in the legacy program, the change will not result in any new tax dollars. Let me repeat that: this change will not result in any new tax dollars.

AB 322 is also intended be a temporary fix. Beginning with the 2017–18 school year, the pupil participation limit, which is currently set at 1 percent, increases one percentage point each school year until the cap reaches 10 percent in 2025–26. Following that school year the participation limit will be eliminated altogether.

Let's put ideological difference aside and do the right thing. Please support this commonsense piece of legislation that guarantees these students, who are victims of a technical error at no fault of their own, will receive the education they deserve. Thank you.

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**Testimony on Assembly Bill 332
September 10, 2015
Assembly Committee on Education
Chair, Representative Jeremy Thiesfeldt**

School Choice Wisconsin supports Assembly Bill 332. Upon passage of the biennial budget, School Choice Wisconsin was made aware that the new parameters surrounding the 1% district cap may have some unintended consequences. Assembly Bill 332 narrowly addresses those concerns.

For the first two years, the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program's 1% district cap applied to only those students who transferred out of a public school. However, the current definition of the 1% district cap applies to all students who reside in the district. This change in definition has resulted in current students occupying more slots under the cap.

In a small number of cases, students that were enrolled in the program in the 2014-15 school year will not be allowed to continue in the program in 2015-16 school year because all the cap slots were filled by returning students.

School Choice Wisconsin believes this was not the intent of the legislature. While there are certain limitations placed on the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program moving forward, at no point were there discussions on removing current students. Senate Bill 250 allows for those students to retain their eligibility in the program.

School Choice Wisconsin would like to thank Senator Stroebel and Representative Sanfelippo for their efforts in finding a solution to this problem.

Jim Bender
President
School Choice Wisconsin