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Testimony on Assembly 621

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and Committee Members, for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 621. This legislation assists families enrolling in Wisconsin's parental choice program.

There are three programs: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), and the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP). To be eligible for the WPCP or RPCP, students must meet the prior year pupil attendance requirement.

The application period for the WPCP is the first weekday in February to the third Thursday in April. If a pupil changes schools within the WPCP, there is another window for applications to be accepted in the first 3 weeks of August.

This second window does not apply to students who transfer from Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) or the Racine Unified School District to the rest of the state. When parents look to enroll their child in a private school, they find that the application window closed back in April. Families often move in the summer to not interrupt the children's education, but the pupil is then forced to go to public school for a year to wait for the application period to reopen.

This issue was brought to my attention when a constituent called my office. The constituent said she moved to the 53rd Assembly District during the summer from Milwaukee and couldn't get her kids into the school she selected. The constituent missed the application window and the vouchers wouldn't transfer.

Assembly Bill 621 has two parts: First, it expands the prior year pupil attendance requirement to include students who used the Special Needs Scholarship Program in the previous school year.

Second, Assembly Bill 621 gives the WPCP August application window to parents if they move after the spring window from the MPCP or RPCP.

This common sense reform standardizes the three Parental Choice Programs, helping parents find a quality education for their children. I thank you for your consideration of this legislation and am happy to take any questions you may have.



JOHN JAGLER

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Testimony on Assembly Bill 621

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and committee members for hearing our testimony on Assembly Bill 621. This is a bill that aims to clear up some ambiguity between the various school choice systems we have across the state and how students transfer between them. Currently, we have three school choice systems, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP) and the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP). Additionally, we have the Special Needs Scholarship Program.

The first part of the bill addresses students who phase out of the Special Needs Scholarship and move to either the WPCP or the RPCP. The bill simply states that a student who attended school under the Special Needs Scholarship satisfies the prior year attendance requirement.

The second section of the bill addresses those transferring from the Racine or Milwaukee Programs to the Statewide WPCP. Currently, there is an August transfer window for students making changes in the Wisconsin program if they miss the February to April window. This August transfer window is not available to students who transfer from the Milwaukee or Racine programs into the statewide program.

Many families move during the summer to not interrupt their children's schooling and if they miss the February to April window they may have to miss a year of choice programming. The bill simply applies the transfer windows uniformly to all the programs so students can more easily move between them.

Thank you for taking my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Assembly Committee on Education

October 21, 2021

Department of Public Instruction

Statement for Information on Assembly Bill 621

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) appreciates the opportunity to provide this written information on Assembly Bill 621.

First, this bill expands eligibility for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) and the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP) by adding an additional prior year attendance eligibility provision for those programs. Under current law, students apply for the WPCP or RPCP must meet one of the following prior year attendance requirements in addition to the income, age, and residency requirements:

- Applying to grades K4, K5, 1, or 9; or
- Meets one of the following requirements for the prior school year: (a) attended a public school in Wisconsin; (b) attended school in another state; (c) were not enrolled in school (including homeschool for the entire prior school year); (d) participated in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), RPCP or WPCP; (e) are on a MPCP, RPCP or WPCP waiting list; or
- Applying to the WPCP and on any prior year WPCP waiting list in 2015-16 or later due to a school district enrollment cap.

The bill adds a provision that allow students that participated in the Special Needs Scholarship Program to meet the prior year attendance requirement.

Second, this bill allows students that prior to the last weekday in July were accepted into the MPCP or RPCP and moved between the last weekday in April and prior to the third Friday in August to transfer their application to another participating school. Under current law, only students that reside in the City of Milwaukee are eligible for the MPCP, and only students that reside in the Racine Unified School District are eligible for the RPCP. If a student lived in the City of Milwaukee when they were accepted prior to July but moved outside the city between the last weekday in April and the third Friday in August, the student would not be able to transfer their application to the WPCP.

This bill would allow the application to transfer to another choice program provided there is space at the school, the student meets the eligibility requirements at time of application, and, if changing to the WPCP, the income requirements for the program are met. In addition, the WPCP limits on student participation (no more than 6 percent from each school district for the 2021-22 school year) may not be exceeded.

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For the current school year, 2021-22, the bill provides transfer requests for applications received by April 2021 can be made between November 1 and no later than November 12, 2021. Transfer students in 2021-22 would be funded by GPR. For school year, 2022-23, these students would be funded with a resident school district general aids deduction. It is not known how many students may move and request a transfer of their application.

The department appreciates the opportunity to provide this information.



TRINITY

LUTHERAN FREISTADT

CHURCH | SCHOOL | CHILDCARE

10729 WEST FREISTADT ROAD, MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53097

21 October 2021

Good morning,

My name is Sam Seefeld, I am the principal of Trinity Lutheran School of Freistadt in Mequon. Our school is located approximately 2.5 miles north of the Milwaukee city line, in the southwest corner of Mequon.

Our school has seen unprecedented growth in the last 3 years, our student body is 120% larger than it was at the start of the '18-'19 school year. I am here today because of our school's unique perspective on this bill; because students from the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and statewide Choice program combine for over 40% of our student body. We are also thrilled to report that the nearly 50% minority representation at Trinity has stayed remarkably consistent over our growth over the past three years. What's even more impressive is that our student body is made up of families from 32 zip codes around southeastern Wisconsin; with students coming from as far north as Sheboygan, and as far south as Oak Creek. This also includes a significant population of Karenni refugee children - whose parents cannot read or speak English. Our doors are truly open to all of God's children all of the time.

What is truly remarkable about God's work at Trinity is that amidst growth our school has improved its state report card three years in a row; and when examining student reading data by students' home public district, Trinity students outperform district averages across the board - for example, the last state report card showed an 18% reading proficiency across MPS, while nearly 50% of Trinity students from MPS were proficient.

The latest data from DPI also demonstrates a clear and continuing trend in Wisconsin family's choice for education freedom. The state's four private school parental choice programs reported a combined third Friday of September 2021 headcount of 48,919; an increase of 6.6 percent over 2020.

As a school just north of the Milwaukee line, we believe it is imperative to continue offering families more and more freedoms when it comes to choosing the school that is best for them. Over the past several years, we have encountered families who are either moving out of Milwaukee, or out from a different state, and into our area, who would have otherwise qualified for the state's choice program. But because of the existing limitations, we were not able to seat students. A family with a change in employment, a relocation for personal reasons, or simply looking for an increased quality of life, should be afforded the same educational opportunities as everyone else.

AB621 is a small and positive step forward towards those freedoms. AB621 eliminates at least one unnecessary (and rather political) boundary within our state choice program by recognizing the various life circumstances that many families are already experiencing within our city. Census data also supports the need for this bill, as the City of Milwaukee lost nearly 3% of its population in the last 10 years, leaving it at its lowest population since 1930. Can we continue to serve those residents seeking better or different opportunities?

If we are serious about addressing student achievement, especially for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, and if we care about the child *first*, then AB621 should be an easy pass from this committee.

Less than two weekends ago, Trinity held its first-ever school benefit gala. The theme for the night was *Every Child - Every Chance*. I encourage the members of this committee, and all of our state legislators, to keep working for that same cause - to give *every family every chance* at a great education. Thank you for your time.

Samuel J. Seefeld, Ph.D.
Principal

October 13, 2021

In reference to: 2021 Assembly Bill 621 (wisconsin.gov)

To the Wisconsin State Legislature,

In the spring of 2021, our family was living in Milwaukee. We started looking at school options for the fall. Our son would be starting kindergarten and my step-daughter would be starting high school.

As residents of Milwaukee, we applied for the Milwaukee School Choice Program. The only and correct program for us to apply to at the time. We qualified and had vouchers for both of our school-aged children.

In May, we had a baby and made the decision to sell our home over the summer, before school started in the fall.

We found a home in Omro, WI. Once we knew that we would be moving in early August, we did research and found a private school in Oshkosh that we wanted to transfer our vouchers to. We contacted the school and DPI for assistance in making the move.

We received the shocking answer that the vouchers would not transfer. Nothing could or would be done because of the way the current process and law is set up.

If you move between applying in spring and starting the School Choice Program as students in the fall, you are unable to participate in School Choice in Wisconsin.

We were not eligible, as Milwaukee residents, to apply for the Wisconsin program in the Spring. And we couldn't transfer the vouchers from Milwaukee to Wisconsin if the kids hadn't yet started school.

This is a loophole that only affects responsible families who choose to move over summer to not disrupt their children's education. As we did.

It was pointed out that we could lie and say we lived in Milwaukee, using someone else's address to have the kids virtually start school for a few weeks and then DPI would transfer our vouchers to Oshkosh, no problem.

We were unwilling to be dishonest in this way. We teach our children that honesty is the best policy, even if it means there are consequences that seem unfair.

The unfortunate part for our family is that, had we been able to transfer this year, our kids would be able to continue on in the School Choice Program in the future. But with the success of our business this year, we fear we won't qualify for the program again

but also won't be able to afford to put all four of our kids through private school as cash students. It is very expensive.

To recap, as a result of the current system, Wisconsin kids who move from one city in Wisconsin to another city in Wisconsin at the "wrong" time of year, are denied School Choice. Even if their parents do everything required to participate in the program.

This is an outrageous set up and one that should be a no brainer to rectify for Wisconsin families.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Nicole R Bartelt
Omro, WI