



ROBERT WITTKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 62nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TESTIMONY: SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

February 23, 2022

Madame Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding a public hearing of **Senate Bill 974 (SB 974)**. SB 974 would support education options for parents and their students statewide by removing the state enrollment caps, family income limits, and grade entry points for Choice schools.

The School Choice program in Wisconsin has benefitted many families. Today we see historic numbers of parents seeking options for their student's education beyond the public school. SB 974 would allow any public school student reimbursement of costs to take up to two courses offered by an approved educational provider or for educational materials. Educational provider includes school boards, institutions of higher education in Wisconsin, charter schools, private schools, tribal schools, and any other entity approved by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Educational materials are those materials a parent may use to educate their child, including curriculum and textbooks. Costs of materials may be reimbursed by the DPI up to \$1000 per student.

I believe opening up the Choice option to all families in Wisconsin will be a welcome change. Again, thank you for holding this public hearing on SB 974.



P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

February 23rd, 2022

Senate Committee on Education
Sen. Darling, Chair
State Capitol, Rm 122 S
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Darling and members of the Committee:

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations, a cross-disability coalition of more than 20 state and local organizations and groups, has significant concerns about two of the bills that are before the Assembly Committee on Education on Wednesday February 16. SB 974 would remove existing income limits and participation limits on Wisconsin's voucher programs; SB 963 would partition the Milwaukee Public School District into four to eight smaller districts. Both of these bills would be disproportionately harmful for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities have federal rights to a free, appropriate public education, but those rights only apply in public schools. SB 974, which proposes an immense expansion of the voucher programs, would funnel scarce funding resources away from the public schools where those rights apply, and into private schools that are not bound by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We know from past decades of experience in Milwaukee that the unbridled expansion of vouchers tends to concentrate the students with the greatest disability-related challenges into public schools, while simultaneously cutting into the funding that supports them. Public schools remain the only schools in Wisconsin that are required to enroll and educate students of all abilities. To support students with disabilities to get the necessary education to lead a full and participatory life in communities across our state, Wisconsin should be supporting public schools rather than expanding voucher programs. SB 974 does the opposite.

SB 963, with its proposal to split the Milwaukee public schools into multiple districts, would add an additional layer of disproportional impact for students with disabilities, given that 19.6% of MPS students have disabilities while the statewide percentage is only 14.2%. The bill leaves undefined what would happen to a student who attends an MPS school outside their new home-district lines after the districts are drawn, but none of the possibilities are good: either undergoing the disruption of being forced to change schools, or the uncertainty and bureaucracy of being suddenly open-enrolled across district lines. In addition, the forcible split would reduce the placement opportunities that are currently available for students with disabilities across the entire city. The new subdivided districts would either incur additional expense in recreating those opportunities, or succumb to financial pressure and fail to offer them at all. A proposal this sweeping should involve a robust stakeholder process, and the lack of that input leaves this bill replete with unintended consequences, particularly for students with disabilities.

The Survival Coalition opposes both SB 974 and SB 963.

To: Legislature

Re: AB968/SB964 — Expanding Charter School Authorizers;
AB967/SB965 — Expanding High Quality District-Authorized Charter Schools; and
AB970/SB962 — Expanding the Voucher Program and Educational Reimbursement Program

Date: February 18, 2022

From: Mrs. Jody Geenen (1511 Primrose Lane, West Bend, WI 53090; 262-343-3486;
jodygeenen777@gmail.com)

This is my written testimony in SUPPORT of AB968/SB964 — Expanding Charter School Authorizers; AB967/SB965 — Expanding High Quality District-Authorized Charter Schools; and AB970/SB962 — Expanding the Voucher Program and Educational Reimbursement Program.

With public schools becoming more and more of centers for indoctrinating our children instead of being places solely for educating our children with truth-and-fact-based basic academics, parents need more options of where to send their children to school. Charter schools can be wonderful options, especially for those families who do not feel comfortable sending their children to local parochial schools. Therefore, our state needs to provide expansion of charter school authorizers, high quality district-authorized charter schools, and the voucher program and educational reimbursement program.

As a past school board candidate twice, I have been reviewing academic resources and curriculum for our school district. To my complete dismay, I have found the resources to be loaded with indoctrination instead of truth-and-fact-based academics that they are supposed to be. Parents don't always have time to review everything their students are being taught. They need to be able to put their children in the hands of educational systems they can trust.

These bills will help alleviate some of those issues. When money leaves the public schools to follow the students to charter schools and parochial schools, it negatively affects the budget of the public schools. This, in turn, creates an incentive for the public schools to find out why families are leaving and then try to make adjustments so families won't leave or maybe they will return.

Please vote in SUPPORT of all three of these expansion bills. Thank you.



WISCONSIN FAMILY ACTION
Marriage|Family|Life|Liberty

PO Box 7486 • Madison WI 53707-7486
608-268-5074 (Madison) • 866-849-2536 (toll-free) • 608-256-3370 (fax)
info@wifamilyaction.org • www.wifamilyaction.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 974
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2022
JULAIN K. APPLING, PRESIDENT

Thank you, Chairman Darling and committee members, for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 974. I am Julaine Appling, president of Wisconsin Family Action. Wisconsin Family Action supports this bill. Thank you to the authors and co-sponsors who have put SB 974 forward.

Wisconsin Family Council, our sister education organization, was started in May 1986, and was begun as a direct result of a major legislative issue in 1983. In 1983, the state legislature was considering legislation that had two primary purposes: 1) to define what a private school is in Wisconsin, and 2) to establish officially what today we call home-schooling. Our statutes refer to this school choice option as a “private home-based educational program.” Founders of our organization worked hard, along with other concerned citizens and private-school leaders to get these educational options codified. I’m thankful everyday for their work and their success.

I relate this story because Wisconsin Family Action and Wisconsin Family Council have always been about educational options. In 1990, when then-State Representative Polly Annette Williams, a Democrat from Milwaukee, authored and successfully passed the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, we were there, supported the measure, and were thrilled when it became a reality—and established the first-in-the-country voucher program that has allowed some parents to get their children out of low-performing public schools and into private schools where they could flourish. We watched in those early years as the program took form, prevailed in some key lawsuits, and began to really flourish in our state’s largest city. We had some issues that needed to be addressed and resolved, and by and large they were. Some private schools were started for the wrong reason and ended up not surviving. These situations acted as a kind of “self-filter” for the program.

We championed and cheered when under Governor Scott Walker the Republican-led state legislature expanded the Parental Choice Program to Racine and then to the entire state as the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program.

Over the years with the formation of School Choice Wisconsin and Wisconsin Institute of Law and Liberty, we have had deep-dive research done that shows that students enrolled in one of our PCP on average do very well, often out-performing their peers in public schools.

In WILL’s most recent *Apples to Apples Study* (issued January 2021, covering 2019 test scores), Milwaukee’s Parental Choice Program Proficiency rates in math exceeded rates in Milwaukee Public Schools by 3.9% and 4.6% in English Language Arts on average.¹ The same study revealed that “Proficiency exceeds traditional public schools 3.05% in the [Wisconsin Parental Choice Program] and [Racine Parental Choice Program] schools.”²

This same study reminds us that “[t]he School Choice Demonstration Project (SCDP) was founded by the state in 2006 to conduct extensive research on the effectiveness of the [Milwaukee Parental Choice Program] using a wide variety of metrics. Scholars in the SCDP applied state-of-the-art matching methods to compare students in the MPCP with students in MPS who were similar in neighborhood, race, and prior achievement. Such studies represent the best analytic techniques, short of true experiments, where students are randomly assigned to a

¹ <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/applestoapplesstudyiii-1.pdf>

² <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/applestoapplesstudyiii-1.pdf>

choice school or not via a lottery. Among the findings from this matching analysis are that students in the MPCP were 4-7 percentage points more likely to graduate from high school (Cowen et. al. 2013). Moreover, students in the MPCP were found to achieve higher scores in reading, though similar scores in math (Witte et. al. 2012). Other findings, not related to academic achievement, include lower incidences of criminal behavior (DeAngelis and Wolf 2016) and extensive economic benefits (Flanders and DeAngelis 2017).”³

These programs save taxpayers money and in general provide a better return on their tax investment. I’ve seen reports varying from \$13,000 per student statewide average to over \$16,000 per student statewide average. The maximum voucher is \$8982 for non-special needs students, with students with special needs getting vouchers of just over \$13,000. Let’s just assume \$14,500 is the average per-pupil cost for public schools in Wisconsin. That means if every student in the voucher program got the highest voucher payment, which never would happen, taxpayers would save about \$5,500 per voucher student. The actual savings is obviously higher.

Right now, as we know, our Choice Programs are limited to individuals with certain incomes, in some cases to certain zip codes, and also by enrollment caps. It’s time to lift all of those, and Senate Bill 947 does all that. It’s time to give all parents, regardless of income or zip code or number of people in their school district, an opportunity to choose the best school for their child.

Expanding the Choice Program stands to reap some very positive results economically for the entire state. According to a report released by WILL in 2020, author Will Flanders, PhD, takes evidence from a study that documents that Milwaukee Parental Choice Program students are more likely to graduate from college and extrapolates, based on that reality, what the economic gains could mean to the state if the programs are expanded. Dr. Flanders posits that Madison could see \$100 million in economic benefits, \$75 million for Green Bay, \$60 million for Appleton and \$24 million for La Crosse.⁴ Education isn’t just about today; it’s about tomorrow—and expanding the Choice Programs means good things for Wisconsin’s future.

Our state’s Parental Choice Programs have been tried and tested now over many years. Studies continue to show students in these programs are, on average, certainly performing no worse than their public-school counterparts and in many cases, are performing not just better, but significantly better. It’s time to give this opportunity to all parents across our state.

Wisconsin Family Action believes parents are responsible for the education of their children. The more educational options parents have, the better as they seek what is best for their children. We urge the committee to support SB 974 and move it to the full Senate expediently.

Thank you for your time today and for your careful consideration of our position on this bill.

³ <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/applestoapplesstudyiii-1.pdf>

⁴ <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/will-ripple-effect-v3.pdf>



TO: Members, Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Rachel Ver Velde, Director of Workforce, Education and Employment Policy

DATE: February 23, 2022

RE: Support for Senate Bill 974, Statewide Parental Choice Programs

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 974. I want to thank Senator Roth and Representative Wittke for authoring this important legislation to expand school choice to all families in Wisconsin.

WMC is the largest general business association in Wisconsin, representing approximately 3,800 member companies of all sizes, and from every sector of the economy. Since 1911, our mission has been to make Wisconsin the most competitive state in the nation to do business. That mission includes making sure Wisconsin's youth are prepared and ready to participate in the workforce.

In 1990, Wisconsin led the nation by creating the parental school choice program in Milwaukee to bring education options to low-income students stuck in failing public schools. Since then, the school choice program has been expanded statewide so that students throughout the state have the ability to get a great education. Unfortunately, the statewide program has both income limits and pupil caps that restrict the number of students that can access this educational option.

Senate Bill 974 removes the statewide pupil participation limits, eliminates the family income limits and creates an education expense reimbursement program (micro-ESA) for public school students. This bill helps us take a giant step forward in reforming our K-12 education system.

Wisconsin has increased spending on K-12 education for the last five state budgets. Unfortunately, even as spending has climbed in recent years, educational outcomes have not improved. And, we have seen this problem made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2016-17 school year, 44.4% of students were proficient in English Language Arts. That number has dropped in subsequent years and hit a low of 33.7% in 2020-21. In math, 42.8% of students were proficient in the 2016-17 school year. The number went up and down slightly the next two years, but then dropped significantly to 33.6% in 2020-21.

These poor outcomes are a huge concern for Wisconsin employers. It is vitally important for employers to have students graduating from the K-12 system that are proficient in reading, writing and math. In WMC's most recent *Wisconsin Employer Survey* that was conducted in January 2022, 88% of employers indicated that they are struggling to hire workers. As employers throughout

Wisconsin have severe worker shortages it becomes even more important that their future employees have basic competencies and skills for the workplace.

That is why our employers are supportive of statewide school choice for all students, as is done in this bill. They want to be sure that students have access to the best schools and the ability to partake in educational options that are the best fit for the student. The micro-ESA program created in this bill will further allow public school students access to wider selection of courses and materials that otherwise would be unavailable to them. The way to improve all of Wisconsin's schools is to create greater competition in the education market. As more students have additional opportunities, this will hopefully drive failing schools and the education establishment to improve outcomes across the board.

WMC urges members of the Senate Committee on Education to support Senate Bill 974 in order to ensure that all students have access to a great education.



WISCONSIN INSTITUTE FOR LAW & LIBERTY, INC.
330 East Kilbourn Avenue, Suite 725, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3141
414-727-WILL (9455)
Fax 414-727-6385
www.will-law.org

February 23, 2022

Madame Chair Darling and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of on Senate Bill 974, a proposal by Senator Roth and Representative Wittke regarding the expansion of the parental choice programs and creation of education expense reimbursement program.

1) Expands the parental choice programs by removing barriers for access.

Senate Bill 974 removes several barriers from the existing parental choice programs to make it easier for families to access the parental choice programs and for private schools to provide more high-quality options for students.

Under the current law, the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) has several barriers that make it harder for both families and schools to participate. For instance, a student may only access a voucher if they are in kindergarten, first or ninth grades unless they meet certain exceptions. Not only is this extremely difficult for families to navigate, it makes it harder for private schools to participate in the program.

Additionally, many schools in Milwaukee and Racine participate in several programs. But students participating in the WPCP must have an income 220% of the federal poverty line while the Milwaukee and Racine programs have an income limit of 300%. This means that families may be denied access to the voucher based on their home address.

Furthermore, enrollment in the choice programs continues to grow. In 2021-22, the WPCP grew by 2,425 number of students. But the WPCP pupil participation limits impacts families in six districts.¹ For example, West Allis-West Milwaukee was rated as “meets few expectations” on the 2020-2021 report cards. Families located in this district are on a waiting list to participate in the choice program due to the pupil participation limits.

Despite these limitations, the WPCP continues to provide families with access to educational options. For example, the Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE) system has more than 2,300 students at its nine schools. About 27% of the student population uses the WPCP to attend one of the nine schools. AB 970 could help more families in the Green Bay area access a high-

¹ Wisconsin & Racine Parental Choice Program 2021-22, https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/Choice/Data_and_Reports/2021-22/21-22_WPCP_6_Limits.pdf



quality school in the GRACE network if the barriers like income limitation and grade point entry requirements are removed.

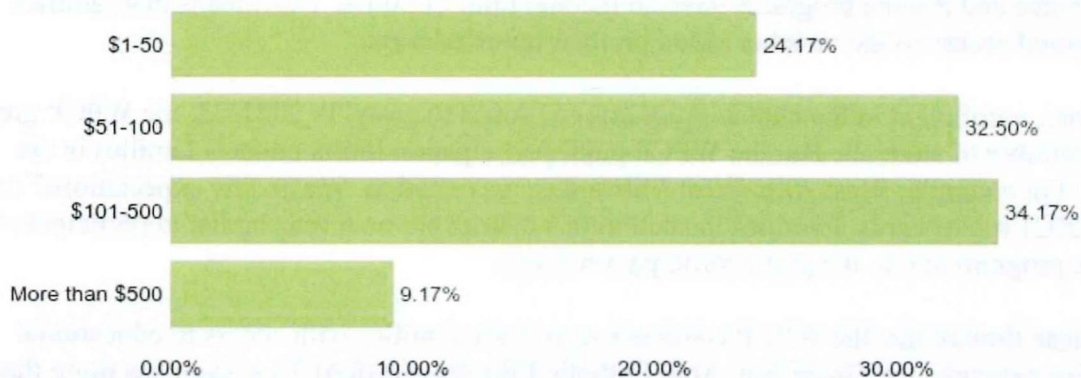
Other private schools are also prevented from expanding by the current regulations. For example, LUMIN has a network of seven schools across Milwaukee and Racine. LUMIN wanted to expand to other parts of the state where there are not high-quality options for students. In 2019, LUMIN opened a private school in Beloit. In preparation of the opening, LUMIN staff reached out to the community and interested families to let them know about the newest option in the community. But the WPCP grade limits and 220% income limit made it harder for families to attend. Unfortunately, a combination of limited participation by families and the COVID-19 pandemic led to the school to close.

SB 974 is addressing barriers that prevent families from accessing high-quality educational options. This bill will help private schools like LUMIN and GRACE to expand and provide more access for families across the state.

2) Provides public school families will access to funds for educational expenses.

When the pandemic hit Wisconsin in March 2020, parents were scrambling to purchase educational materials for their children so they could learn from home. As the pandemic and rolling school closures have continued over the past two years, parents continue to bear the burden of creating an educational environment at home for their children.

In April 2020, WILL surveyed Wisconsin parents on their experiences with children learning from home during the early pandemic.² Our survey results found that parents were spending money on educational materials for their children.



30% of the 400 respondents reported spending money on educational materials and the highest rates were among low-income respondents. It is a reasonable assumption that as the pandemic and school closures continued into the 2020-21 school year that parent's investment into

² <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/survey20presentation20final.pptx.pdf>



educational materials increased. Indeed, a nationwide analysis in 2021 found an increase of nearly \$232 billion—or 10%—on educational spending during the pandemic.³

SB 974 provides public-school parents with critical access to funding that will help cover such costs, including textbooks and curriculum. The bill allows the Department of Public Instruction to approve other educational expenses as well.

This legislation also allows public school families to use the education expense reimbursement program to attend up to two courses at participating schools, including private and tribal K-12 schools, institutions of higher education and approved educational operators. This will give public school students access to more course options without having to leave their current school.

The impact of the pandemic on student learning loss is still being determined. As parents and teachers work to address to close these gaps, access to additional educational options may help students do just that. For example, a student struggling with reading proficiency may use the resources in SB 974 to access additional curricular materials to supplemental their classroom work. This bills flexibility gives parents and students the option to customize their educational options to help their child succeed.

SB 974 is a bill that will help students across the Badger state access a high-quality education and more educational options.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Libby Sobic
Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty
libby@will-law.org

³ EdWeek, “Parents’ Spending on Education Boomed During the Pandemic. Here’s Why.” Mary 14, 2021, <https://marketbrief.edweek.org/marketplace-k-12/parents-spending-education-boomed-pandemic-heres/>



MEMO

TO: Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Michael Brickman, Senior Fellow, Institute for Reforming Government

DATE: February 23, 2022

RE: Support for SB 974, School Choice Expansion

Chairwoman Darling and members of the committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing today on these important education reform proposals. My name is Michael Brickman, and I am a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Reforming Government (IRG), a Wisconsin based think tank. I am testifying today on behalf of IRG Action, the advocacy partner to IRG.

It's time for Wisconsin to reclaim its status as a national leader in education reform and empower parents by giving them more control over their children's education. Our K-12 education system - and therefore our economy - is held back by a K-12 system that does not help prepare our children for the workforce.

> Roughly two out of every three fourth graders in Wisconsin are not proficient in reading.¹

> Wisconsin ranks last in the country for reading proficiency for black students.

> Before the pandemic - which has only exacerbated the problem, 11% of African American students in Green Bay were proficient in English and 9.5% of African American students in Madison were proficient in English.

> Since 1992, Wisconsin is one of only six states to see a significant drop in reading test scores.

¹ https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/WI?cti=PgTab_OT&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=WI&f s=Grade&st=MN&year=2017R3&sg=Gender%3A+Male+vs.+Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single+Year&tss=-2017R3 &sfj=NP

> One out of five incoming freshmen in the University of Wisconsin system have to retake high school math.²

Fortunately, Wisconsin has long been a leader in offering public and private school options to parents. Our storied history of parental choice started with bipartisan backing, and we hope that the bill before you now will also enjoy support from across the aisle. After all, it is the children of Wisconsin that SB 974 aims to help, and that should come before loyalty to any party or special interest group. Thank you especially to Senator Roth and Darling for authoring this bold reform.

The current school choice program, even with limitations on income eligibility and enrollment caps, is a proven success. According to a review of studies by the Wisconsin Federation for Children³, the parental choice programs in Wisconsin are proven to result in:

1. higher academic achievement,
2. improved mental health of students,
3. higher likelihood of college admission,
4. reduced crime and safer schools.

That's why nearly 400 individuals from all over Wisconsin signed an IRG Action Fund petition recently in support of this important reform.⁴

Unfortunately, in recent years, progress has stalled, and too many children lack access to a good school. The COVID-19 Pandemic has caused a precipitous drop in test scores and has demonstrated the need to give all parents, no matter their income, background, or zip code, a set of good educational choices for their kids.

SB 974 will reclaim Wisconsin's national leadership role in providing options to children and their parents. It removes state enrollment caps, family income limits, and grade entry points on the existing Milwaukee, Racine, and statewide parental choice programs. Bold reforms for sure, but absolutely necessary if your goal is to help children succeed.

It also creates individual scholarships for children in public schools to take courses from an approved provider. Funds can also be used to pay for educational materials and resources offered by a wide variety of education providers. We're all concerned about the impact of the pandemic on kids. If there's any step that could help individual families overcome COVID-related learning loss, it's this.

If passed, this would be one of the biggest wins for children and families since the start of the school choice program, enabling all children to have access to world-class courses,

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https://www.wisconsin.edu/education-reports-statistics/download/educational_statistics/2018-Remedial-Report-Final.pdf

³ <https://www.wifederationforchildren.org/research/>

⁴ <https://irgaction.com/2022/02/22/nearly-375-wisconsinites-sign-petition-in-support-of-expanding-school-choice/>

materials, and other educational supports, no matter their background or where they are in the state. And even if they want to stay in their assigned public school.

It will provide more low- and middle-income families with opportunities that they are currently denied: to choose the school that is right for their child's individual needs, even if they cannot afford private school tuition and are unable to move to a different school district.

Parents with children attending public schools would be able to choose resources or courses from a variety of providers. This will allow students affected by COVID-related learning loss to catch up on their own terms and will protect families in the future if schools close again.

The bill also supports local school districts by allowing them to focus on what they do best, while empowering parents to choose the foreign language, career and technical education, early college, and other coursework that work best for their children. I encourage you to support this bill and to do even more to ensure funds follow the children and options are maximized. Here, language from the 2013 biennial budget can serve as a guide.

When parents are given options, they will choose schools based on better academic performance.⁵ Right now, over 46,000 students use a voucher to attend a private school of their choosing. **But we should not limit educational freedom based upon income and where a family lives.**

SB 974 unapologetically says that this Legislature will do everything possible to help children and families get into schools that work for them, and that give the children the best shot to succeed. **Members of the committee, let's be bold again in Wisconsin.** Please support moving SB 974 to the full Senate.

⁵ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15582159.2019.1595949>



February 23rd, 2022

Senate Committee on Education
Sen. Darling, Chair
State Capitol, Rm 122 S
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Darling and members of the Committee:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 962, SB 963, SB 964, SB 965, SB 974. We are concerned will disproportionately impact students with disabilities.

SB 962 (Parental Rights)

Under the bill, all parents would be informed of any acts of violence or crimes occurring in schools, which could include students with disabilities. Many children with disabilities act out or exhibit behaviors to communicate. The bill does not clearly define what is considered an act of violence or crime. Advocates are concerned behaviors of students with disabilities will be reported to other parents and could lead to the student being more isolated or labeled as problematic. It is not clear how the bill would protect the disability status of students with disabilities, which is required under IDEA.

SB 963 (Reorganizing of Milwaukee's schools)

Under the bill, Milwaukee Public Schools would become four separate districts. 19.6% of Milwaukee's student body are students with disabilities. Currently, parents can choose a school located anywhere in the district that best fits their child's special education needs, even if it is outside their neighborhood. It's unclear what happens to students with disabilities after new district lines are drawn. Creating four separate districts will mean less choice for parents and may result in schools that have higher proportions of students with disabilities and less funding from a smaller local tax base.

SB 964 and SB 965 (Charter Schools and Charter School boards)

These bills would expand of charter schools. In Wisconsin, charter schools are public schools and must provide special education required under IDEA but often have limited resources available to students who chose these options. Charter schools in Wisconsin may have certain acceptance requirements that may make it difficult for students with disabilities to gain entry. Nationally, 9.5% charter school students have disabilities, while 14.2% of students in Wisconsin's traditional public schools have disabilities.

SB 974 (Choice Income Limits)

This bill eliminates income and enrollment limits for the school choice program in Wisconsin. Private schools are not required to provide supports and services to children with disabilities under IDEA and the ADA. Public schools are required to educate students with disabilities. Often, private schools are not able to meet the needs of children with disabilities, which results in higher proportions of students with



normal

disabilities in the local public schools, and funding shortfalls result from serving higher need and higher cost students.

BPDD is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities¹.

Thank you for your consideration,

Beth Swedeen

Beth Swedeen, Executive Director,
Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

¹ More about BPDD https://wi-bpdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Legislative_Overview_BPDD.pdf.

**SENATOR ALBERTA DARLING
STATE OF WISCONSIN SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Senate Bills 974, 964, 965, and 962

February 23, 2022

IN SUPPORT

My name is Kristin Franke and I am a resident of Ottawa, WI, wife and mother of three daughters. My youngest daughter attends a new charter school, Lake Country Classical Academy, in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. I am testifying in favor of Senate Bills 974, 964, 965, and 962.

Regarding SB974, I am in support because it is critical that parents maintain the rights pertaining to their child(ren)'s upbringing, education, religion, health care, and mental health and that measures are in place to prohibit the state from infringing on said rights. The State/Government's duty is to ensure the rights of its citizens, or those of the parents/guardians on behalf of its underage citizens, not make decisions regarding said citizens' upbringing, education, religion, health care, and mental health. Protecting the rights of parents is crucial and necessary in a free society and required to ensure good faith and trust of its citizens towards their government. There have been far too many cases of local school districts taking it upon themselves to override parental requests regarding invoking a gender reassignment protocol and new pronouns, promoting concepts and materials in schools that are inappropriate, and hiding acts of bullying, violence, and medical treatments that occur within the school from the parents. Even if these issues are few and far between, parents should still have access to all aspects of their minor children's lives without impediment. SB974 would be a great start to affirming parents' rights and implementing some safety measures against government interference and overreach in their children's lives.

Regarding SB964, I am in support because it is necessary to expand the ability to authorize independent charter schools in the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin's charter authorization process is much more restrictive than many other states and has prevented families from the vast opportunities that charter schools can provide. Charter schools, like Lake Country Classical Academy (which already has a waitlist of over 250 families before the end of their first year), can provide families access to a quality of education that is usually only available at high-cost private schools. This enables more students the opportunity for an education that is not only excellent but is chosen because it is a good fit for the student and family. School choice allows families to enroll their students in schools where they want to be, for a variety of reasons, which not only increases diversity in the student population but creates a strong community because people want to be there and are invested in the outcome. They can provide a public education that caters to individual preference and need. Wisconsin citizens pay for the public educational services with our tax dollars and should have input on how that

money is used for the education of our children. We have the right to choose what school and education model is best for our kids and should not be expected to both pay taxes *and* exorbitant private school costs (that are simply not even feasible for the majority of citizens). So many families want this, as is evidenced by the waitlists for these charter schools.

Personally, I can attest that having the option to attend the new charter school, Lake Country Classical Academy in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, had been an absolute answer to prayer and a blessing for our family and hundreds others. Our family has pursued a classical education model since our 20-year-old became school age. Due to the lack of classical options locally and the high cost of the few private options available, we chose to homeschool our children, which was beautiful but required many sacrifices. With my older children off in high school and college, Lake Country Classical Academy has proven the best option for in-person schooling for our youngest daughter and has far exceeded all of our expectations in terms of the quality of the curriculum, the instructors, the administration, and community. In just a few short months, LCCA has already created an atmosphere that is rich, welcoming, and inculcates a love of that which is true, good, and beautiful in its students. This school is already enriching the lives of more than 400 students from several counties, with hundreds more lined up. This would not have been possible for all of these families without the public charter process, but because of numerous roadblocks in the existing WI charter authorization process, this school almost did not exist. That is why the WI charter authorization process needs to be expanded.

Regarding SB965, I am in support of the proposed modification because it will expand the ability to create more high quality authorized charters. If a charter school is performing at a high level, it follows that the process to open more of those high-performing schools should be simplified and expanded.

Regarding SB962, I am in support because it provides more avenues for school choice by removing income limits for parental choice and participation limits in the WPCP, thus increasing the number of eligible families, as well as providing an education expense reimbursement program that will allow more opportunities and educational options for families.

In closing, I am in support of Senate Bills 974, 964, 965, and 962 because they protect parents' rights regarding their children and allow for more high quality educational opportunities via charter schools and school choice. Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristin Franke". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Kristin Franke
414-403-0902
kfranke@wi.rr.com

To: Members of the Wisconsin Senate Committee on Education
From: Americans for Tax Reform

Dear Chairman Darling,

On behalf of Americans for Tax Reform and our supporters across Wisconsin, I urge you to support Senate Bill 974, legislation before the committee today that would improve education opportunities and outcomes in Wisconsin by empowering more parents with the resources to send their kid to the school that best suits their child's unique needs. Wisconsin has a storied history as the place where the school choice movement began with bipartisan support. Today 46,000 students use an education voucher to attend private school in Wisconsin. However, more children deserve and need the chance to attend better, safer schools. As such I urge you and your colleagues to advance SB 974 today.

There were only six states to have reading scores significantly drop over the past three decades and Wisconsin is one of them. Two out of every three Wisconsin fourth graders lack reading proficiency. Today roughly 20% of freshman enrolling in the University of Wisconsin system must take remedial math. Minority students suffer greatly because of substandard public schools. Before the pandemic even hit, less than 10% of black students in Madison schools were proficient in English, while only 11% were reading proficient in Green Bay schools. Despite the strides that you and your colleagues have made to improve the education system in Wisconsin, it's clear further reforms are needed to expand school choice and provide better education opportunities. The pandemic has only worsened education outcomes and caused kids to fall behind, making the need for reform that expands school choice all the more imperative.

SB 974 is a smart reform that will eliminate family income limits for voucher eligibility, grade entry points, and state enrolment caps so that more parents and children can utilize education vouchers. SB 974 would also support children who want to stay in their assigned public school, but would benefit from outside instruction and coursework from an approved provider, other education materials, and additional resources to supplement their public school education.

With the personal resources to move into the school district of their choosing and the ability to pay for private school tuition out of pocket, high income and wealthy families already have school choice. SB 974 would expand school choice so that more low- and middle-income families are also empowered with the resources to provide their children with better schooling options, ones that are better suited to the unique needs of an individual student. Enactment of SB 974 will help make it so the ability to access the best education is not limited to children in upper income households. Enactment of SB 974 would also help students who experienced pandemic-related learning loss to catch up and will free them from ever again being trapped in a school that refuses to do in-person learning.

Another smart reform before the committee today, one that would lead to better education outcomes and improved opportunities in Wisconsin's largest metropolitan area, is SB 963. SB 963 dissolves the Milwaukee public school system, terminates the board, and in the place of the existing school district that has proven too big to succeed, creates smaller school districts that are closer and more responsive to the kids, families, and neighborhoods they serve. This is

certainly a bold reform, but such boldness is needed to rectify the serious problems plaguing Milwaukee public schools.

I thank you for your public service. As one of the 14 states where income tax relief was enacted last year, you and your colleagues commendably took action in 2021 to make Wisconsin a more attractive place to live, work, and do business. In 2022, I urge you to build upon your previous efforts to make Wisconsin an even better place to raise a family, which you can do by passing SB 974 and 963. If I or ATR can be of assistance, feel free to reach out to me or Patrick Gleason, ATR's vice president of state affairs, at pgleason@atr.org or 202-785-0266.

Sincerely,

Grover G. Norquist
President, Americans for Tax Reform