



# CINDI DUCHOW

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 99<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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**Senate Committee on Education  
Testimony on Assembly Bill 71  
School District Operating Referenda  
June 12, 2025**

Thank you, Chairman Kitchens, and members of the Assembly Committee on Education for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 71, relating school district operating referenda.

Under current state law, school districts seeking additional funding for operating costs have two options when considering a referendum, recurring and non-recurring. The main difference between the two options is that recurring referenda create a permanent increase in the tax base for the school district, while non-recurring referenda have an expiration date where the tax base returns to its previous level. With declining enrollment levels, I question the necessity of these operating referenda. By eliminating the recurring referendum and limiting the non-recurring referendum, I hope to foster fiscal responsibility in Wisconsin school districts. I believe that my school district needs to demonstrate how this funding is improving student outcomes. If they fail to show positive results, property taxpayers should have the right to veto ongoing spending, which they will, if AB 71 is passed, at the next non-recurring referendum.

One case study I would like to reference is the 2024 Milwaukee Public Schools recurring operating referendum of \$252 million. This referendum passed by fewer than 2,000 votes and creates a permanent increase in the school district tax levy by such an amount that Mayor Cavalier Johnson stated on UpFront that MPS now has a larger tax levy than the entire City of Milwaukee. This referendum passed at a time when MPS enrollment is down 50,000 students from its peak in the late '90s of over 100,000.

I wish I could tell you that Milwaukee is an outlier, but it is emblematic of the state for referendums across the State. Since 2015, school districts have added \$807 million to their tax levy via recurring referendums. Note that this is not for new stadiums or facilities, just pure operating spending. This is on top of an already historically high spending on k-12 education by the State. For those of you who continue to say our schools are critically underfunded despite declining enrollment and record spending, I ask "how much is enough?"

One part of school funding that I believe is often overlooked is the impact on property taxpayers. Those who are priced out of their home and can afford to move - will leave the school district to escape high taxes. This leaves their neighbors, especially the working-class property taxpayers, to

foot the bill for this increase, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. Additionally, those who move into the school district will pay for a referendum they did not approve. (School districts are unlikely to undo a recurring referendum and if there are examples, feel free to share).

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any question you have.

Member	School District	Amount lost due to MKE Referendum	Percent Change	Recent Referendum ?	Total of Referendum
<b>Rep. Duchow</b>	Arrowhead	\$ 418,698.00	-6.7%		
	East Troy Community	\$ 336,937.00	-5.8%		
	Fort Atkinson	\$ 235,036.00	-1.2%	Yes (2016,2020)	1.75 million, 2.25 million
	Hartland - Lakeside J3	\$ 350,675.00	-7.7%		
	Jefferson	\$ 160,720.00	-1.3%	Yes (2018)	3.1 million
	Johnson Creek	\$ -	0.0%		
	Kettle Moraine	\$ -	0%	Yes (2020)	7 million
	Lake Country	\$ -	0%		
	Mukwonago	\$ 760,151.00	-2.8%		
	Oconomowoc	\$ 1,130,322.00	-7.2%		
	Palmyra-Eagle	\$ 74,656.00	-1.9%		
	Watertown Unified	\$ 319,149.00	-1.2%		
	Waukesha	\$ 3,701,984.00	-6.4%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 7,488,328.00</b>			<b>14.1 million</b>
<b>Rep. Kitchens</b>	Algoma	\$ 56,558.00	-1.0%		
	Denmark	\$ 303,163.00	-2.7%		
	Gibraltar Area	\$ -	0%	Yes (2018)	4.2 million
	Green Bay Area	\$ 1,403,997.00	-0.8%		
	Kewaunee	\$ 83,941.00	-1.2%		
	Luxemburg - Casco	\$ 153,979.00	-1.2%		
	Sevastopol	\$ -	0%		
	Southern Door County	\$ -	0%		
	Sturgeon Bay	\$ 133,705.00	-2.6%		
	Washington Island	\$ -	0%	Yes (2024)	995K
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 2,135,343.00</b>			<b>5.15 million</b>
<b>Rep. Goeben</b>	Appleton Area	\$ 3,008,126.00	-2.9%	Yes (2022)	5 million
	Freedom Area	\$ 330,291.00	-3.2%		
	Kaukauna Area	\$ 357,877.00	-0.9%		
	Little Chute Area	\$ 131,704.00	-1.2%		
	Pulaski Community	\$ 656,889.00	-2.2%		
	Seymour Community	\$ 129,142.00	-0.7%	Yes (2017)	1.86 million
	West De Pere	\$ 329,999.00	-1.2%		
	Wrightstown Community	\$ 113,427.00	-1.1%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 5,057,455.00</b>			<b>6.86 million</b>
<b>Rep. Mursau</b>	Beecher - Dunbar - Pembine	\$ 40,345.00	-11.8%		
	Coleman	\$ 77,167.00	-1.7%		

Crandon	\$	281,389.00	-6.7%		
Crivitz	\$	121,862.00	-8%		
Florence	\$	-	0%		
Goodman - Armstrong Creek	\$	-	0%		
Laona	\$	22,049.00	-1.2%		
Lena	\$	27,153.00	-0.8%		
Marinette	\$	148,891.00	-0.9%		
Niagra	\$	21,120.00	-0.7%		
Oconto Falls Public	\$	147,608.00	-1.1%	Yes (2021)	4.4 million
Peshtigo	\$	61,151.00	-0.7%		
Phelps	\$	-	0.0%		
Suring Public	\$	-	0%		
Three Lakes	\$	-	0%		
Wabeno Area	\$	-	0%		
Wausaukee	\$	-	0%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>948,735.00</b>			<b>4.4 million</b>

**Rep. Snyder**

DC Everest	\$	374,410.00	-0.7%		
Wausau	\$	597,153.00	-0.9%	Yes (2021)	4 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>971,563.00</b>			<b>4 million</b>

**Rep. Dittrich**

Arrowhead UHS	\$	418,698.00	-6.7%		
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Hustisford	\$	50,827.00	-3.5%		
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Stone Bank	\$	-	0%		
Swallow	\$	-	0%		
Watertown Unified	\$	319,149.00	-1.2%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>3,106,041.00</b>			

**Rep. Penterman**

Beaver Dam Unified	\$	263,719.00	-1.1%		
Columbus	\$	115,168.00	-1.4%		
Dodgeland	\$	55,051.00	-1.0%		
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	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,886,842.00</b>			<b>7.1 million</b>
<b>Rep. Melotik</b>						
	Cedarburg	\$	217,065.00	-1.5%		
	Germantown	\$	672,167.00	-3.9%		
	Grafton	\$	363,284.00	-3.5%		
	Mequon-Thiensville	\$	-	0%		
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	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,511,929.00</b>			
<b>Rep. Brill</b>						
	Campbellsport	\$	147,257.00	-1.8%		
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	Sheboygan Falls	\$	76,165.00	-0.6%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>2,035,038.00</b>			
<b>Rep. Hong</b>						
	Madison Metropolitan	\$	2,331,053.00	-6.2%	Yes x3 (2016,2020, 2024)	26 million, 33 million, 100 million 159 million
<b>Rep. Cruz</b>						
	Racine Unified	\$	1,986,050.00	-1.2%		
<b>Rep. Phelps</b>						
	Diramd-Arkansaw	\$	82,508.00	-1.2%		
	Eau Claire Area	\$	617,166.00	-0.9%		

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# CHRIS KAPENGA

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 71

Senate Committee on Education

Thursday, June 12<sup>th</sup> 2025

Thank you, Chairman Kitchens, and members of the committee for hearing testimony on Assembly Bill 71 today. I also would like to thank Representative Cindi Duchow for her work on this legislation.

Under current law, in order to bring in more taxpayer funds to schools to help pay for operating costs, school districts can authorize referendums, where voters in a school district can vote to approve of an increase above the levy limit. These referendums are either recurring or non-recurring. If a referendum is non-recurring, the increase above the levy limit is set for only a certain amount of years. However, if the referendum is for a recurring purpose, then a school district can raise taxpayer revenue above the limit in perpetuity.

School districts all across our state have been approving more and more operating referendums, both recurring and non-recurring. We have all seen examples of this in the news. Most recently and notably are Madison's referendum package passed in the fall, which included a \$100 million recurring operating referendum, and Milwaukee's \$250 million recurring operating referendum passed in the spring last year.

To protect taxpayers, this bill eliminates operating recurring referendums, and requires nonrecurring referendums to be limited to last no more than 4 years. School districts and voters will still be able to authorize and approve of operating referendums, but this bill places a sensible and commonsense timeline on every referendum that is approved.

Even with record funding from the state, school districts are adamant in receiving more money from taxpayers and homeowners. According to the Wisconsin Policy Forum, school districts in 2024 held a record 241 referendums. But with record referendums come higher property tax increases – property tax increases for families who have just bought their first home, for seniors on fixed income, and for any homeowner in a school district that passes a referendum. Taxpayers deserve certainty and transparency from school boards, and AB 71 does both.

Thank you again, Chairman Kitchens, for allowing testimony for this important bill. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.



June 12, 2025

**Assembly Committee on Education  
Department of Public Instruction Testimony  
2025 Assembly Bill 71**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) thanks Chair Kitchens and members of the committee for the opportunity to share testimony on Assembly Bill 71 (AB 71).

The DPI is in opposition to AB 71.

DPI believes school boards are best positioned to ensure that funds are expended in accordance with the needs of the community. Referenda are important tools for boards when their state governed revenue limits do not allow them to deliver on the community's expectations for public education. Raising revenues beyond statutorily imposed limits via referenda is one of the only means through which school boards can address fiscal challenges without negatively impacting the educational needs of students.

Under current law, a school district can exceed its revenue limit for general school operations (beyond statutory per pupil adjustments) by receiving voter approval via referendum. With the aim of safeguarding taxpayers, AB 71 would eliminate the ability of school districts to seek a recurring, or permanent, operating referendum. It would also limit the ability of a district to utilize a temporary, nonrecurring referendum by limiting the term of a referendum to no more than four years.

Elected school boards are best equipped, in collaboration with taxpayers, to determine whether a temporary, nonrecurring referendum or a permanent, recurring referendum is needed. Conditions in many districts have changed significantly since revenue limits were imposed for the 1993-94 school year. For some communities, obtaining a base-building increase in revenue raising authority via recurring referendum is appropriate. It ensures that district revenues increase to match a growing need.

By eliminating a district's ability to increase its base revenue over the long-term, AB 71 presumes that districts are currently inappropriately utilizing recurring referenda. The table below shows the number of referendum questions, by type, on the ballots for the February 18 and April 1, 2025, elections.

**Table 1. Number of Questions on Ballots, By Type\***

<b>Referenda Type</b>	<b>2/18/2025</b>	<b>4/1/2025</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Issue Debt	1	31	32
Nonrecurring	4	53	57
Recurring	0	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>94</b>

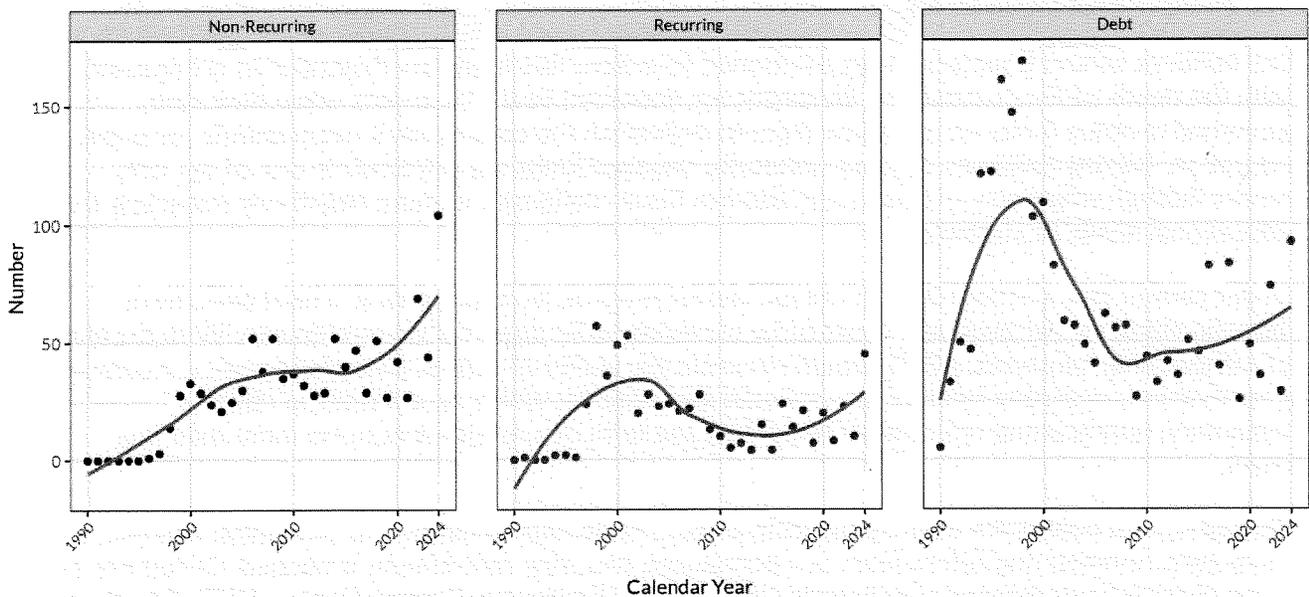
\* Full details on the Spring 2025 referenda are available at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/reporting/safr/referenda-info>.

Of those referenda questions, issuing debt accounted for a total of 34 percent, nonrecurring accounted for the majority at a total of 61 percent, and recurring was the least used, at 5 percent. This demonstrates that school boards utilize recurring referenda in limited fashion.

The types of referenda forwarded in 2025 match trends over time. In the initial years of revenue limits, school districts attempted recurring referenda in greater numbers than nonrecurring. However, this trend reversed over time and the number of nonrecurring referenda has exceeded the number of recurring referenda in all years since 2004.

**Figure 1. Number of Referenda (by Type) on Ballots, 1990-2024**

**Ballot Referenda By Type**  
1990 - 2024



The Department of Public Instruction has made a reasonable effort to ensure that the accompanying information is up-to-date, accurate, complete, and comprehensive at the time of disclosure. These records are a fair and accurate representation of the data on file at the DPI. Authorized information is accurate only as of the time of validation and verification. The DPI is not responsible for data that is misinterpreted or shared in any way. Derived conclusions and analyses generated from this data are not to be considered attributable to the DPI.

Additionally, passage rates tend to be higher for nonrecurring referenda than for recurring and have been far more volatile for recurring referenda than for nonrecurring – though the gap between the two, and the volatility for recurring referenda, in passage rates has lessened over the last several years.

Assembly Bill 71 also implies that districts frequently seek approval of lengthy nonrecurring referenda that remain in effect for years upon years. However, while all 2025 nonrecurring referenda questions were multi-year, 70 percent were for four or fewer years.

**Table 2. Multi-Year Nonrecurring Referenda, Number of Years**

Statistic	# of Years	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Minimum	2	3	5%	5%

Mode	3	20	35%	40%
Median	4	17	30%	70%
n/a	5	16	28%	98%
Max	6	1	2%	100%

Under AB 71, districts would be limited to the use of nonrecurring referenda that could only be in effect for no more than four years and be forced to persevere through continual referenda, just to meet ordinary operating costs. The constant cycle of nonrecurring referendum after referendum would foster financial instability and an inability to accurately predict district revenues. A repeated need for nonrecurring referenda also places additional administrative and financial burdens on districts, which must continually dedicate resources to the referenda resolution and election process to sustain operating revenues.

Asking neighbors to increase their taxes is a last resort for schools – they aim to be responsible stewards of resources. As local conditions change, referenda is the only tool schools have to adjust their spending limits. By imposing rigid standards on districts, taxpayers, and communities that fetter the collective will, AB 71 limits local control and the democratic process through which communities determine how to best meet the needs of students. AB 71 runs counter to Wisconsin’s education philosophy of local control for school districts, and for this and the reasons listed above, we urge your opposition to AB 71.

Thank you for allowing DPI to share this testimony. Please direct any questions to Kim Vercauteren, Policy Initiatives Advisor, at [kimberly.vercauteren@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:kimberly.vercauteren@dpi.wi.gov).



**To:** Assembly Committee on Education

**From:** Cori Lamont, Vice President of Legal and Public Affairs

**Date:** June 12, 2025

**RE:** AB 71 – School District Operating Referendum

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The Wisconsin REALTORS® Association (WRA) has a long-standing commitment to supporting quality education, holding the line on property taxes, and preserving the ability of property owners to decide through referendum whether to raise their own taxes to fund local needs, including schools.

**Background**

The quality of local schools is one of the most important factors influencing homebuyers' decisions and, in turn, property values. Whether or not clients have children, many see strong schools as a sign of a stable, thriving community and a smart long-term investment. Well-regarded school districts can enhance marketability, drive demand, and support healthy housing markets. Good schools don't just educate students, they help build stronger neighborhoods, attract families, and sustain local economies.

**Talking Points**

**Balancing Quality Education and Property Tax Affordability**

In Wisconsin, local property taxes are the primary funding source for public education, creating a direct link between school funding and property tax levels. When school funding falls short, taxpayers often face referenda to increase their property taxes to support programs, staff, and facilities. While quality schools strengthen communities and property values, relying heavily on property taxes can create affordability challenges. Therefore, transparency, accountability, and voter oversight in school funding decisions are essential.

**Wisconsin's High Property Taxes and the Response**

Wisconsin has the 8th highest property taxes in the nation and the 2nd highest in the Midwest, placing a growing burden on seniors on fixed incomes, working families, and first-time homebuyers. While the average American household pays about \$2,969 annually in property taxes on a median-priced home, Wisconsin homeowners pay closer to \$5,000.

To address this, lawmakers enacted strict levy limits in 2011, saving homeowners over \$14 billion in property taxes over the past decade. These limits do not eliminate local flexibility—they empower voters. If a local government or school district wants to increase property taxes, voters must approve it through a referendum. This system promotes transparency, accountability, and gives residents a direct say in tax increases.

## **AB 71: Strengthening Voter Oversight in School Referenda**

Despite levy limits, current law allows recurring school operating referenda with no expiration date. This can lock in permanent tax increases without giving future voters a chance to reassess local needs or financial capacity.

AB 71 restores balance by limiting recurring school operating referenda to a fixed term—such as four years—requiring voter reauthorization. This ensures:

- Ongoing voter oversight
- Accountability for how funds are used
- Decisions that reflect changing economic realities

Because Wisconsin relies more heavily than most states on property taxes to fund public education, regular voter-driven review is essential. AB 71 supports quality schools while protecting homeowners, renters, and businesses from unchecked, long-term tax burdens. This reform is a key step toward addressing Wisconsin's housing affordability and workforce challenges by keeping property taxes in check.

## **Protecting Housing Affordability and Wisconsin's Economic Future**

High property taxes are a major barrier to housing affordability and economic growth. For example:

- On a \$322,000 home, the median price in May 2025, property taxes total approximately \$5,107 annually, nearly the cost of a second mortgage.
- With monthly mortgage payments around \$2,627, many families are priced out of homeownership, and employers face greater challenges attracting and retaining workers in Wisconsin.

This affordability crisis worsens when recurring school referenda continue indefinitely, locking taxpayers into permanent increases without reevaluation. AB 71 provides taxpayers regular opportunities to review, reassess, and vote on future increases.

By striking the right balance between supporting schools and giving voters control, AB 71 protects homeowners, renters, and businesses from unchecked, long-term tax burdens. In the broader effort to address Wisconsin's housing affordability and workforce challenges, responsible reforms like AB 71 are essential to keeping property taxes manageable.

We respectfully request your support for AB 71.



June 12, 2025

**Testimony to the Assembly Education Committee on Assembly Bill 71,  
relating to school district operating referenda**

**Wisconsin Education Association Council**

The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) represents teachers and other education employees in every part of Wisconsin. WEAC also advocates for great public education for the common good, which is why we are opposed to Assembly Bill 71.

Current state law places revenue limits on public school districts. A given school district's leadership is allowed to go to voters in their district to request that the district exceed the limits. State law already places restrictions on how funding can be raised and spent. Because the state has been under-funding our public schools and shifting state resources to unaccountable voucher programs in recent decades, school district after school district in Wisconsin has been forced to go to referendum to provide quality education and pay its bills.

School referendums in Wisconsin have largely been successful. Voters are saying loud and clear: "We support our local public schools."

The success of school referendums appears to be the reason why AB 71 has been introduced. AB 71 would limit voters' right to support their schools by saying that an operating referendum to exceed school district's revenue limit may only be for nonrecurring purposes and the referendum may not apply to more than four years. Such a change is not needed and would further limit voters' ability to support schools.

One example of how the state is under-funding public education is special education. The state currently reimburses school districts for about 30% of their special education costs. In contrast, the state provides private schools using the special needs scholarships with more than 90% of their costs. This is outrageous. If the state were to fully fund our public schools, like it does private schools, there would be no need at all for school districts to go to referendum.

There are a lot of ongoing conversations about how to uplift Wisconsin's public schools, and WEAC welcomes conversations when the goal is actually to improve our schools. However, when restrictions are being added to referendums on top of the funding that is already being cut at the state and the federal levels, the goal is clearly not to improve our schools. If a school district decides a referendum is needed and the people want to use their right to vote to improve the public education in their community, they should have the right to do so.

Referendums are proposed by leaders in school districts who understand what their districts need, and the referendums are set up to address those needs. Referendums are the last line of defense, and without them, Wisconsin public schools cannot effectively find solutions to the challenges they face.

Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President  
Bob Baxter, Executive Director



an NEA affiliate

Further limiting local control is not the solution. As mentioned earlier, WEAC advocates for great public education for the common good, and WEAC believes that this legislation will not put us on the path to great public education which in turn does not benefit the common good. Thank you for your time and we look forward to continuing our conversations on how to adequately fund Wisconsin public education.

Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President  
Bob Baxter, Executive Director



June 10, 2025

Representative Joel Kitchens  
Chair, Wisconsin Assembly Education Committee  
State Capitol – Room 314 North  
PO Box 8952, Madison, WI 53708

Representative Kitchens:

Good morning,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding AB 71. I am Jeff Weiss, superintendent for the Kenosha Unified School District.

It is important for me to share some background regarding the Kenosha Unified School District. We are the third largest school district in the state with approximately 18,500 students. We are home to Lakeview Technology Academy which was recently ranked the second-best high school in the state by U.S. News. Prairie Lane Elementary was nominated for the Blue-Ribbon School Award based on high levels of student achievement. Our high-quality fine arts programs are known throughout the state for excellence; and our theater program is nationally recognized, as well. We have graduates who are performing on Broadway.

In February, the District brought forward a non-recurring 5-year operating referendum to our community for \$23MM per year. The decision to go to referendum was made after significant deliberation by the school board and gathering of feedback from the community. Painful cuts were made prior to the decision to pursue a referendum. KUSD closed seven schools, downsized the district office, and cut over 200 positions over the past three years. This resulted in \$10MM worth of annual savings, however, it still wasn't sufficient to close our projected \$23MM budget shortfall for the 25-26 SY.

We are responsible stewards of public funds. KUSD, as are many school districts throughout the state, is in an untenable financial position due to the fact that state funding has not kept up with inflation for the past 16 years. During the 21-22 biennium, public school districts across the state received no increases in state funding and were forced to rely on federal ESSER funding. This funding expired September 2024 compounding our budgetary pressures.

Going for a referendum is one of the last things that I want to do as a superintendent. Public education must be a unifying force in a community. Good schools benefit all. Referendum questions divide communities, often along partisan lines. The amount of time, political capital, and money that is spent to bring forward a referendum would be much better spent on improving student achievement and the learning experience for our students. In a six-week period leading up to the February 18 referendum in Kenosha, we held four town hall meetings and over 20 small meetings with local groups such as Rotary, Kiwanis, United Way, Senior Center, town and village meetings and other groups, interviews with five television stations and four radio stations to explain the need for additional funding.

Unfortunately, this is the only vehicle we have available to increase revenue for the school district. And it is creating significant inequalities throughout the state. The school district directly to the north of Kenosha just passed their referendum. We are in danger of losing our competitive edge behind other school districts in our area.



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In 2017, the state legislature formed a bi-partisan committee to address the issue of school funding. The Blue Ribbon Panel was co-chaired by Rep. Joel Kitchens and Sen. Luther Olson. At the time this report was published, I was very excited that the state funding issue had been solved. Some of the recommendations in the Panel's report such as special education reimbursement to 60% and 12 equal installments of state aid to school districts would have transformational effects on school funding needs.

Without the implementation of the key provisions of the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations, school districts must have the opportunity to ask their communities for additional funding. As I stated earlier, the decision to go to referendum is one that school districts make after serious deliberation.

Most importantly, operating referenda are a symptom of a larger issue. The state has the playbook to fix this larger problem of state funding by implementing the recommendations of the 2019 Blue Ribbon Commissions' report. I implore the state legislature to take the groundbreaking work of this important committee seriously and begin implementing their recommendations.

Best regards,



Dr. Jeffrey Weiss  
Superintendent of Schools



**TO: Assembly Committee on Education**

**FROM: Paul Rozeski, Director of Government Affairs & Member Relations, WPT**

**Date:** June 12, 2025

**RE: Assembly Bill 71 - Relating to: School district operating referenda**

Good morning, Chairman Kitchens, and thank you for holding a hearing on AB-71, because this bill in its current form, takes a tool used by school districts, and codifies a guideline that they have already established adhered to by their own accord.

In the fall of 2024, there were 61 non-recurring referenda proposed on ballots.

Two year -	5
Three year -	11
Four year -	34
Five year -	10
Six year -	2*

The asterisk on the six year is to note that one district had two non-recurring referenda on the same ballot. Out of a total 62 non-recurring referenda, 50 were four years or less, 81% in the busiest referenda cycle in our state's history. A clear majority of non-recurring referenda fall in this window, and had the remainder of the districts not extended the proposal one extra year, it would be universal.

This bill is not punitive. It is barely restrictive, yet, it is critically important. This is a basic safeguard for the taxpayer, that they know the intent and purpose of this tool is maintained at an already established and accepted level, which is why we are in support of this version of AB-71.

**Paul Rozeski**  
Director of Member Services and  
Government Relations

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Wisconsin Property Taxpayers is comprised of thousands of small businesses, farms, and homeowners throughout Wisconsin. Founded in 1985, the organization committed to providing its members with up-to-date information, legislative advocacy, and exclusive cost-saving benefits.



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DANIEL M. ROSSMILLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Education**  
**FROM: Christopher Kulow, WASB Government Relations Director**  
**DATE: June 12, 2025**  
**RE: Assembly Bill 71, relating to: school district operating referenda.**

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) is a voluntary membership association representing Wisconsin public school boards.

WASB Resolution 1.26 was approved by member school boards in 2018 and states (in part): “The WASB opposes any limitation on the duration, scope or effect of school referenda.”

Assembly Bill 71 does just this, by eliminating recurring operating referenda and limiting a nonrecurring operating referendum to no more than four years.

Recurring referenda are the one tool that schools have, to provide themselves with some level of predictability for financial planning purposes. Since automatic inflationary increases in revenue limits ended in 2009, there has been a lack of predictability in each state budget cycle creating increased budgetary challenges for schools.

Supporters of this bill argue one set of voters should not be able to raise school spending and taxes on a future set of voters. Future voters still have the opportunity to vote on future referenda or elect school board members who share their view on whether the school district should go to the voters for a referendum.

Supporters have also argued that many voters are unaware the recurring referenda are permanent base building for a school district. Voters and school districts do seem to grasp what it means as we have seen recurring referendum questions are less frequently asked and approved at lower rates as compared to nonrecurring and bonding. In April, of 89 questions on the ballot, five were recurring and only one of those was approved.

This bill will exacerbate the constant cycle of referenda that schools are already experiencing and will further pull time and resources away from education purposes. We oppose this bill because referenda are the only option available to schools if the state continues to tightly control revenue limits below inflationary increases. School districts do not want to ask their voters to raise their taxes. It’s a matter of last resort. If state policy makers are concerned about the impact on property taxes, a better way to address this is through the state budget by returning to inflationary increases in spendable resources for schools.