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January 24, 2007

Senator Fred A. Risser, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Legislative Organization
Room 220 South
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53701

Speaker Michael Huebsch, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Legislative Organization
Room 211 West
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53701

Dear Senator Risser and Speaker Huebsch:

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Joint Legislative Council's Special Committee on Disaster Preparedness Planning. That committee has been meeting since last September and is reviewing a number of issues that were included in its study assignment. One of those issues is continuity of state and local legislative operations during times of disaster.

On the issue of continuity of the state Legislature, the committee heard from Senate Chief Clerk Rob Marchant and Assembly Chief Clerk Patrick Fuller. After hearing the testimony of the Chief Clerks, the committee determined that a higher priority needs to be given to developing a plan for continuity of the state Legislature during a disaster. It is important that a plan, developed with the guidance and approval of the Joint Committee on Legislative Organization, be put into place as soon as possible. While we all hope that such a plan is never used, it is important to have it available in case of a pandemic or terrorist act.

The plan needs to address important issues such as alternative meeting sites, lines of succession, compliance with Open Meetings Law requirements, and conducting business by electronic means if a pandemic or terrorist act makes it unsafe for all legislators to physically be in the same location at the same time. The plan should also identify any statutory changes that would be needed in order for it to be implemented.

In summary, the committee hopes that you will direct the Chief Clerks to make the development of a plan for continuity of the state Legislature during a disaster a top priority in the early part of this legislative session.

Thank you for giving this matter your attention.

Sincerely,

Representative Joan Ballweg, Chair
Special Committee on Disaster Preparedness Planning

JB:wu

cc: Robert Marchant
Patrick Fuller