



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF
WISCONSIN**

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To: Senate Committee on Education Reform and Government Operations

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 1

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin supports policies that provide an equitable, quality public education for all children. Indeed, the League recognizes that “quality” and “equality” are inseparable principles in public education. While SB 1 is a big improvement over the legislation being considered by the Assembly, the League nonetheless urges you to oppose SB 1 for the following reasons:

- The League believes there should be substantial control of school programs and personnel by the local school district, and a fundamental activity of most of our 17 local Leagues has been to conduct a study of their local school system. This bill would weaken local control by elected officials by setting up two new statewide boards which are populated by appointees. In that sense the bill weakens accountability.
- Any proposal which withholds funding for underachieving schools or districts is antithetical to the principle of improvement. Research has shown time and again that it is not schools that are failing, but rather students from poor socio-economic circumstances. We certainly cannot meet their needs by cutting funds. A label of “chronically failing” or a loss of funding will only cause competent teachers to leave and accelerate the failure.

The League opposes any efforts to divert tax dollars from our public schools to private schools. Further, we believe that any institution or organization that receives public funds for K-12 education should be required meet the same requirements as public schools, including:

- accounting for the use of public funds;
- meeting performance standards for their students;
- meeting the same state standards for all school employees.

Studies have failed to show that the voucher system in Milwaukee has provided children a better educational option than they would have received in their public schools. In addition, the Legislative Audit Bureau found last year that most of the vouchers in the recent expansion of the program went to families whose children were already in private schools. Clearly, taking funding from public school budgets – which are already suffering from cuts – and diverting it to private schools that are not publicly accountable and families who do not have children in the public schools is *not* a solution to the challenges our schools and families face.

SB 1 addresses many complicated matters, and it deserves more input from the local elected officials who are accountable for education in their communities. This legislation certainly should not be fast-tracked. We urge you to oppose this bill. Thank you.