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Members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Technology and Consumer Protection:

Thank you for allowing me to testify on SB 191 and 195. I am Kim Kaukl the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WIRSA) an organization of 200 plus members with 150 school districts and several CESAs, technical colleges, universities, business and individual members. WIRSA represents the students, administrators, teachers, school board members and community of our rural schools.

I am here today to register our opposition to SB 191 and 195. These bills can be very damaging to public school districts especially the numerous rural districts in our state. With the financial constraints on public schools, referendums and community support are the keys that are keeping many of the rural districts alive. In our rural communities, referendums have become a part of the school's budgeting cycle due to the limited funding at the State level. The proposed dollars in the Governors education budget are helpful, but this funding would only bring us back to 2011 levels meaning many districts will still need to run referendums. Therefore, it is important for legislators to leave referendums up to local control and let each district decide what is best for them. In recent years, referenda have been supported locally with over 70% success. This rate shows how important and valued public education is to each of these communities. With the limitations on borrowing along with the proposed restrictions in these bill, this could virtually put some districts and communities in a precarious state. So, ask yourself, what is the need and reason for these proposed bills? Is it to restrict local control or is this to protect certain special interest groups?

It is our belief that the points below need to be considered:

- These bills are anti-local control.
- With limited funding, referenda are the way many districts can access resources. These proposals will significantly impact declining enrollment districts which are often small rural school districts many of which need referenda to maintain educational opportunities for children. These bills, if adopted, could have the effect of forcing districts to consider dissolving or consolidating if they cannot pass a referendum and would dictate when they could go to voters.
- This bill will further exacerbate the trend of creating "Haves" and "Have Nots". Opportunities for students will further be determined by their zip code.
- These bills are restrictive and inflexible for school boards.
- Limiting initial referendum resolutions for capital projects such as new buildings, renovations or additions will reduce the effective planning of these projects to meet the needs of students and citizens. What's more, a poorly-timed referendum date could add to the construction time-frame and possibly increase costs to taxpayers.
- We also find it interesting that when you look at the co-sponsors for these bills there are no truly rural legislators showing support. Could that be that they understand the negative impact these restrictions will have on their districts?

As we have testified in the past, referendums are about local control and should be left that way. Local voters know what is best for their communities. We ask that you support the right to local control and oppose SB 191 and 195. Thank you for listening.

Thank you,

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