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February 21, 2022

To: Committee on Education

Re: Oppose AB967, AB968, AB970,

Support AB1039, AB1040, AB1041, AB1042, and AB1047

With an historic budget surplus, the State of Wisconsin has an extraordinary opportunity to more fully realize its constitutional obligation to support a system of public schools “as nearly uniform as practicable” to ensure that all children have high quality educational opportunities regardless of location in the state or wealth of the community. Increasing our investment in public education would also ensure that opportunities are equitably offered to all. In other words, we have an opportunity to fully fund public education. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin (LWVWI) supports efforts to ensure that public dollars are spent for this purpose and favors policies that provide greater transparency in how taxes are collected and spent. Likewise, the LWVWI opposes efforts to diminish public control of education and privatize education by siphoning public funds for private education.

To that end, we draw your attention to a series of bills that, if passed, would help voters understand how their educational dollar is being spent and place limits on programs that weaken public accountability. This package (AB 1039, AB 1040, AB 1041, AB 1042, AB 1047) would:

- Cap the number of participants in the voucher programs at the number in the 21/22 school term
- Eliminate the ill conceived special needs Scholarship
- Require that tax bills make clear how much money is being spent on voucher programs,
- Would permit voters to approve or disapprove of voucher expenditure through referenda in their community
- Hold teachers in voucher schools to the same licensure requirements as teachers in public schools
- Ensure that voucher schools do not receive more per pupil in state aid than public schools receive

These bills deserve serious consideration and a public hearing. We encourage League members to voice their support for public hearings and passage of this package.

Unfortunately, there are a series of bills currently being fast-tracked through the legislative process which would accelerate the privatization of public education in the State of Wisconsin. The most egregious of these is AB 970, which would eliminate both income limits and any limits on the number of students who could participate in the state's four existing voucher programs. The Wisconsin Fiscal Bureau estimates that the initial cost would be approximately \$577 million in 2022-2023 alone. In other words, rather than restoring investments in public education, this bill would ignore those needs and fully fund private rather than public education in the state. LWVWI opposes AB 970 for the following reasons:

1. The bill is not requested by voters or families in the state; it originates from partisan politics.
2. Voucher programs were designed as experiments to improve educational results. After 30 years of experimentation, no significant academic achievements have been evidenced in any of the voucher programs in the United States. Yet the political agenda for vouchers continues, revealing that the real goal is privatization of public schools.
3. The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that vouchers could be allowed if funding for public schools was adequate to meet the state constitution requirements. In 2018, the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission on School Finance reported that public school funding was inadequate.
4. It is clear that funding two systems of education in Wisconsin will bankrupt the state in a short time period. Public schools are the system of education required to be created and funded by the state constitution and must be supported adequately.

Two other bills would likewise diminish the authority of locally elected school boards and place educational decisions in unelected boards and beyond the reach of voters. AB 967/SB 965 would permit a charter school authorized by a school board to expand (including the cost of that expansion) without the approval of the school board. AB 968/ SB 964 would create a state Charter School Authorizing Board, which would have the authority to approve charter schools and place them in any community in the state without the approval of local voters or the local school board. The LWVWI believes decisions about what public schools exist and should be supported by a community is better left to the discretion of publicly elected school boards and the voters who elect them. Accordingly, we oppose AB 967/SB 965 and AB 968/ SB 964.

Thank you.

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