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Testimony on Senate Bill 608

Thank you Chairwoman Darling and committee members for hearing our testimony on Senate Bill 608. This is a bill that aims to clear up some ambiguity between the various school choice systems we have across the state and how students transfer between them. Currently, we have three school choice systems, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP) and the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP). Additionally, we have the Special Needs Scholarship Program.

The first part of the bill addresses students who phase out of the Special Needs Scholarship and move to either the WPCP or the RPCP. The bill simply states that a student who attended school under the Special Needs Scholarship satisfies the prior year attendance requirement.

The second section of the bill addresses those transferring from the Racine or Milwaukee Programs to the Statewide WPCP. Currently, there is an August transfer window for students making changes in the Wisconsin program if they miss the February to April window. This August transfer window is not available to students who transfer from the Milwaukee or Racine programs into the statewide program.

Many families move during the summer to not interrupt their children's schooling and if they miss the February to April window they may have to miss a year of choice programming. The bill simply applies the transfer windows uniformly to all the programs so students can more easily move between them.

Thank you for taking my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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Testimony on Senate Bill 608

Thank you Chairwoman Darling and Committee Members, for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 608. Simply put, this bill assists families enrolling in the statewide parental choice program.

Wisconsin has three parental choice programs: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), and the rest of the state falls under the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP). To be eligible for the WPCP or RPCP, students must meet the prior year pupil attendance requirement.

The attendance requirement is not the only thing parents need to be aware of. The application period for the WPCP is the first weekday in February to the third Thursday in April. If a pupil changes schools within the WPCP, there is another window for applications to be accepted in the first 3 weeks of August.

This exception does not apply to students who transfer from the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) school district or the Racine Unified School District to the rest of the state. Families often move in the summer to not interrupt the children's education. When parents look to enroll their child in a private school, they find that the application window closed back in April. The pupil then goes to public school for a year to wait for the application period to reopen.

Senate Bill 608 has two parts: First, it expands the prior year pupil attendance requirement to include students who used the Special Needs Scholarship Program in the previous school year.

Second, Senate Bill 608 gives the WPCP August application window to parents if they move after the spring window from the MPCP or RPCP.

This common sense reform standardizes the three Parental Choice Programs, helping parents find a quality education for their children. I thank you for your consideration of this legislation and am happy to take any questions you may have.

October 13, 2021

In reference to: Senate Bill 608

To the Wisconsin State Legislature,

In the spring of 2021, our family was living in Milwaukee. We started looking at school options for the fall. Our son would be starting kindergarten and my step-daughter would be starting high school.

As residents of Milwaukee, we applied for the Milwaukee School Choice Program. The only and correct program for us to apply to at the time. We qualified and had vouchers for both of our school-aged children.

In May, we had a baby and made the decision to sell our home over the summer, before school started in the fall.

We found a home in Omro, WI. Once we knew that we would be moving in early August, we did research and found a private school in Oshkosh that we wanted to transfer our vouchers to. We contacted the school and DPI for assistance in making the move.

We received the shocking answer that the vouchers would not transfer. Nothing could or would be done because of the way the current process and law is set up.

If you move between applying in spring and starting the School Choice Program as students in the fall, you are unable to participate in School Choice in Wisconsin.

We were not eligible, as Milwaukee residents, to apply for the Wisconsin program in the Spring. And we couldn't transfer the vouchers from Milwaukee to Wisconsin if the kids hadn't yet started school.

This is a loophole that only affects responsible families who choose to move over summer to not disrupt their children's education. As we did.

It was pointed out that we could lie and say we lived in Milwaukee, using someone else's address to have the kids virtually start school for a few weeks and then DPI would transfer our vouchers to Oshkosh, no problem.

We were unwilling to be dishonest in this way. We teach our children that honesty is the best policy, even if it means there are consequences that seem unfair.

The unfortunate part for our family is that, had we been able to transfer this year, our kids would be able to continue on in the School Choice Program in the future. But with the success of our business this year, we fear we won't qualify for the program again

but also won't be able to afford to put all four of our kids through private school as cash students. It is very expensive.

To recap, as a result of the current system, Wisconsin kids who move from one city in Wisconsin to another city in Wisconsin at the "wrong" time of year, are denied School Choice. Even if their parents do everything required to participate in the program.

This is an outrageous set up and one that should be a no brainer to rectify for Wisconsin families.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Nicole R Bartelt
Omro, WI



Senate Committee on Education

October 14, 2021

Department of Public Instruction

Statement of Information on Senate Bill 608

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) appreciates the opportunity to provide this written information on Senate Bill 608.

First, this bill expands eligibility for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) and the Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP) by adding an additional prior year attendance eligibility provision for those programs. Under current law, students apply for the WPCP or RPCP must meet one of the following prior year attendance requirements in addition to the income, age, and residency requirements:

- Applying to grades K4, K5, 1, or 9; or
- Meets one of the following requirements for the prior school year: (a) attended a public school in Wisconsin; (b) attended school in another state; (c) were not enrolled in school (including homeschool for the entire prior school year); (d) participated in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), RPCP or WPCP; (e) are on a MPCP, RPCP or WPCP waiting list; or
- Applying to the WPCP and on any prior year WPCP waiting list in 2015-16 or later due to a school district enrollment cap.

The bill adds a provision that allow students that participated in the Special Needs Scholarship Program to meet the prior year attendance requirement.

Second, this bill allows students that prior to the last weekday in July were accepted into the MPCP or RPCP and moved between the last weekday in April and prior to the third Friday in August to transfer their application to another participating school. Under current law, only students that reside in the City of Milwaukee are eligible for the MPCP, and only students that reside in the Racine Unified School District are eligible for the RPCP. If a student lived in the City of Milwaukee when they were accepted prior to July but moved outside the city between the last weekday in April and the third Friday in August, the student would not be able to transfer their application to the WPCP.

This bill would allow the application to transfer to another choice program provided there is space at the school, the student meets the eligibility requirements at time of application, and, if changing to the WPCP, the income requirements for the program are met. In addition, the WPCP limits on student participation (no more than 6 percent from each school district for the 2021-22 school year) may not be exceeded.

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For the current school year, 2021-22, the bill provides transfer requests for applications received by April 2021 can be made between November 1 and no later than November 12, 2021. Transfer students in 2021-22 would be funded by GPR. For school year, 2022-23, these students would be funded with a resident school district general aids deduction. It is not known how many students may move and request a transfer of their application.

The department appreciates the opportunity to provide this information.