



JIM DOYLE
GOVERNOR
STATE OF WISCONSIN

January 20, 2006

Mr. Timothy R. Sheehy
President
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
756 North Milwaukee Street
Suite 400
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

Dear Tim:

Since early last year, I and representatives from my office and my Administration have been discussing changes to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program with you. You personally know of my desire to reach a compromise on this issue because I and my staff have discussed it with you many times. It is unfortunate for the children of Milwaukee that you have decided that, rather than work with me on a solution and a compromise, you would rather engage in divisive tactics and push extreme positions that you know I cannot accept.

Let's make a few things clear. First of all, I did not impose a participation cap on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. That cap was enacted into state law during the 1990s—under Governor Thompson.

Second, this potential crisis was intentionally precipitated by school voucher lobbyists and Republican legislators. Voucher proponents actively opposed and Republicans defeated a sensible rule put forth by DPI in 2004 that would have protected existing students from having to change schools and allowed currently participating schools to maintain their enrollments. Republicans and voucher supporters did so with the full knowledge that, without this rule, students could be displaced from schools if the enrollment cap was reached. They chose to politicize this issue rather than put the interests of the students first. If you and other voucher advocates had put your effort into honest discussions then we might possibly have solved this issue already.

Clearly, it doesn't have to be this way.

I am deeply concerned about the potential impact upon children, families, and high-quality private schools that imposing a strict pro-ration of seats could have. I do not support the alternative recently proposed by the Department of Public Instruction, unlike what your dishonest ads imply. That's why we must continue to work toward a solution that's best for Milwaukee children and their families.

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In November, I outlined a proposal which would lift the cap by 3,000 students—which, after numerous discussions with you, we believed would cover increased school choice enrollments for the next two years. The 3,000 figure is also nearly 1,000 more students than the last Republican-sponsored bill that was sent to my desk. As I have modified my position in the interest of compromise, you and Republican leaders have changed your positions to be more extreme. As you know, despite attempts by both Secretary Marotta and Secretary Bablitch, Speaker Gard has been unwilling to engage in productive discussions that would lead to compromise. Instead, the Republican Legislature has sent me bills that they knew I would veto. These bills lifted the cap but did not address the need for educational accountability or provide support for all Milwaukee students—by helping the remaining 96,000 students who are in Milwaukee Public Schools or reducing class sizes in kindergarten through third grade.

Undoubtedly there are high-quality private schools that participate in the voucher program, but repeated scandals and unexpected school closings have afflicted the program and the students it serves. As you know, individuals need no credentials or expertise to open a voucher school. These schools may employ teachers with no training and only a GED and administrators without a high school or college degree. In 2004, one voucher school was closed because a school principal purchased two Mercedes Benz with tax dollars. This year, DPI has stopped payments to voucher schools because they don't provide a minimal level of instruction. And a recent *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* investigation uncovered one school serving just two pupils where the education program included field trips to McDonald's, and another where an administrator described the teaching approach as just "a lot of baby-sitting."

The needed solution is not as simple as just lifting the cap. That approach does a disservice to Milwaukee students and parents—and to Wisconsin taxpayers.

For the \$93 million in state tax dollars that will be spent on private school vouchers this year, taxpayers deserve assurance that students receive at least a minimal level of quality instruction from these voucher schools. If you and your members are confident of the quality of all voucher schools, you should not be afraid of some minimal accountability requirements.

In addition, let's not lose sight of the fact that lifting the cap carries a price tag for state and Milwaukee taxpayers. For example, adding 3,000 students to the program this school year would cost an additional \$19 million—for a total cost of \$112 million.

As your members wrote in their letter, "Our businesses depend on local schools for an educated work force." I couldn't agree more. That's one of the many reasons that as Governor I have strongly supported investments in education. That's also why I am asking for additional help for the children in MPS, not just choice schools. I simply cannot allow the choice program to be expanded at the expense of other public school children in Milwaukee, who under your latest proposal, will see further cuts to their

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schools. We must help both private and public school children. But that is obviously not the interest of Republican leaders who care more about having a political issue, not helping all the children in Milwaukee.

It is up to us and to your members to nurture a broad vision of high-quality education for every single student in Milwaukee. That is what I am committed to.

I hope we can work to resolve this issue without resorting to further dishonest attacks and high-pressure tactics that are divisive and unproductive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Doyle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" and last name "Doyle" clearly distinguishable.

Jim Doyle
Governor

cc: MMAC Board Members