

Sen. Darling, Rep. Kooyenga: To look at steps to ensure implementation of school facilities law

Posted on Thursday, Mar 16, 2017

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Sen. Darling, Rep. Kooyenga to Look at Steps to Ensure Implementation of School Facilities Law

Madison – A recent report by the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) shows Milwaukee is consistently not making vacant school buildings available for sale to education operators even though state law clearly requires them to do so. The authors of the law say the report raises serious concerns, and they will be looking for ways to make sure the law is being followed as intended.

“Good schools help anchor neighborhoods and increase property values. Vacant buildings don’t help at all,” Senator Darling said “Every day in Milwaukee, kids walk past taxpayer-funded empty school buildings or ride buses across town at great expense because these vacant schools remain unsold. It’s not fair to taxpayers and it’s certainly not fair to the children and parents.”

In 2015, the state legislature passed a law requiring that vacant or underutilized school buildings owned by the City of Milwaukee be made available for sale to other school operators. A recent report by WILL indicates that, despite this law, few of these properties have been offered for sale by the city and efforts by several different school operators to purchase facilities that have been made available have been stymied by the city.

From the WILL report:

- The City of Milwaukee failed to list all of the vacant and underutilized buildings for sale and, according to the city’s website, only 5 of the 15 empty buildings can be purchased.
- The city’s implementation of the law has created obstacles to the purchase of these buildings – creating additional hurdles and unnecessary delays and ignoring state mandated deadlines. For example, Right Step, a choice school that predominately serves children expelled from MPS, was denied the right to purchase a building, 10 months after submitting a letter of interest.
- Milwaukee taxpayers have spent over \$10 million to maintain nearly 40 buildings that are vacant or operating at less than 50% capacity.

“The buildings serve as an empty shrine to a bureaucratic disregard for children and taxpayers,” Representative Kooyenga said, “We need to look at what additional steps we can take to remove obstacles like these that make city residents continue to pay for the status quo and that prevents poor children from receiving a quality education.”

The WILL report is available, here: <http://www.will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Final.pdf>