

Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: Commends Gov. Walker for criticizing Superintendent Evers' weak ESSA proposal

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September 13, 2017 – Milwaukee, WI – The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty commends Governor Scott Walker for issuing a letter to State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers that criticizes the missed opportunities to put forth a bold and meaningful state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Under the new federal education law, ESSA, every state must submit a state plan to the U.S. Department of Education that will determine the direction of K-12 education policy in the state. Flexibility was built into the law to provide states with the opportunity to take bold and innovative action to address their state's unique challenges. But Wisconsin's state plan, as drafted by Superintendent Evers, settles for doing more of the same.

"Your bureaucratic proposal does little to challenge the status quo for the benefit of Wisconsin's students," wrote Walker, taking specific aim at Evers' proposal for "rigorous intervention" for low performing schools. "In your plan, schools may simply implement an improvement plan created under the supervision of the Department of Public Instruction. I hope you will agree that adding layers of bureaucratic paperwork does little to help low-performing schools."

WILL's Vice President for Policy CJ Szafer responded: "Governor Walker's letter criticizing Superintendent Evers' weak ESSA state plan lends an important voice to the growing number of Wisconsinites who are concerned and disappointed over the draft state plan. With more than 50,000 Wisconsin students attending failing schools, settling for more of the same is simply unacceptable. Unfortunately that is exactly what Superintendent Evers is proposing for the direction of K-12 education policy in Wisconsin."

WILL has been an early and active critic of Superintendent Evers' process and plan for ESSA. WILL attorneys CJ Szafer and Libby Sobiech testified earlier this year about ESSA to a legislative committee. In May, WILL issued a policy memo highlighting how Wisconsin's draft state plan was failing to take advantage of ESSA's flexibility in order to pursue bold reforms. This was in stark contrast to states like Florida and New Mexico that opted to utilize the new federal resources under ESSA.

And in August, WILL attorneys took to the pages of the Wall Street Journal to highlight for the nation how Wisconsin ought to serve as a warning that even when federal lawmakers devolve power back to the states, that freedom can be squandered without bold vision and leadership.