

# Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: The never-ending story of Milwaukee's vacant school buildings

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## ***THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE IS FAILING TO FOLLOW STATE LAW, STATE MUST INTERVENE (AGAIN)***

**March 10, 2017 - Milwaukee, WI** - A new [WILL report](#) explains how the City of Milwaukee is failing to follow state law, preserving the never-ending vacant school building crisis. In total, Milwaukee has at least 15 empty school buildings and taxpayers have spent over \$10.2 million on maintenance for empty buildings in the last decade.

This problem was supposed to be solved. In 2015, the state legislature, led by State Sen. Alberta Darling and Rep. Dale Kooyenga, passed a law to force the City to sell its empty school buildings to private and charter schools. But, two years later, the City is ignoring state law and the vacant schools problem remains - even though seven different private and charter schools have attempted to purchase these buildings. Authored by WILL attorneys CJ Szafir and Libby Sobic, *The Never-Ending Story of Milwaukee's Vacant School Buildings*, explains:

- The City of Milwaukee refuses to list all of the vacant and underutilized buildings for sale. According to its [website](#), only 5 of the 15 empty buildings can be purchased.
- This is because the City STILL allows MPS to decide which buildings are vacant, keeping the "shell game" going.

- The City also makes it as hard as possible to purchase buildings – creating additional hurdles and unnecessary delays and ignoring state mandated deadlines. For example, Right Step, an MPCP school that predominately serves children expelled from MPS, was denied the right to purchase a building, 10 months after submitting a letter of interest.
- As a result, there currently exists at least 15 empty school buildings and another 25 buildings operating at less than 50% capacity. In total, our report shows that Milwaukee taxpayers have spent over \$10.2 million to maintain empty buildings.

Let's be clear. This is a scandal by any definition. As MPS struggles with less than 60% of their children graduating and less than 14% of children proficient in reading, the City is not complying with state law, making it very difficult for successful private and charter schools to expand.

But it does not have to be this way. The report highlights how the state legislature can improve the Surplus Property Law – and perhaps end the vacant schools saga once and for all.

The report can be found [here](#) and appendices [here](#).