

# WisDems: Democratic Party of Wisconsin files ethics complaint against Deb Kerr

Posted on Friday, Apr 2, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

(MADISON) — State Superintendent of Public Instruction candidate Deb Kerr violated state law when she used official, taxpayer-funded resources to the benefit of her private consulting business, a complaint filed by the Democratic Party of Wisconsin (DPW) alleges. Emails obtained and published by the Wisconsin State Journal last month show that, on multiple occasions, Kerr used her official email and the trappings of her position as Superintendent of Brown Deer School District to promote her consulting company, Lead Greatly LLC.

The complaint states, “The crux of this complaint is that records show that on multiple occasions, over the course of several months in 2020, Dr. Kerr used her official BDS email to solicit clients or conduct business for her private consulting business, Lead Greatly LLC.”

“Our kids learn from what they see,” said **DPW spokesman Joe Oslund**. “Every public official has a responsibility to behave ethically and follow the law, but that’s especially true for someone who wants to be a role model for every public school student in Wisconsin.”

According to the State Journal:

*State superintendent candidate Deborah Kerr solicited clients and organized branding for her private consulting business through her public school district email address, including several times during work hours, prior to her retirement as Brown Deer School District superintendent last year.*

*Emails obtained by the Wisconsin State Journal show Kerr used her district email address during work time to set up her private consulting firm, Lead Greatly LLC, on multiple different occasions from March to July 2020.*

*... Records show Kerr also:*

- Spent time during work hours discussing branding for Lead Greatly with her administrative assistant, who was helping Kerr with graphic design, through her district email.*
- Mentioned her new consulting firm to superintendents in Fox Point Bayside School District and Maple Dale-Indian Hill School District while arranging district-related meetings to discuss consolidation projects.*
- Directed a project manager with the Consortium for School Networking to Lead Greatly in her final days as superintendent of Brown Deer.*

The complaint alleges that Kerr's behavior violated two state laws designed to prevent public officials from abusing official resources for personal financial gain:

**COUNT 1: Violation of Wis. Stat. 19.59**

*Wisconsin Statute 19.59(1)(a) provides that "No local public official may use his or her public position or office to obtain financial gain or anything of substantial value for the private benefit of himself or herself or his or her immediate family, or for an organization with which he or she is associated."*

*Wisconsin Statute 19.59(1)(c)(2) provides that no local public official may "[u]se his or her office or position in a way that produces or assists in the production of a substantial benefit, direct or indirect, for the official, one or more members of the official's immediate family either separately or together, or an organization with which the official is associated."*

*Dr. Kerr's use of her official BDS email address, and the attendant prestige and status that it conveys, constitutes misuse of public resources and is a violation of the code of ethics she was bound to as a local public official. Specifically, she used BDS resources—both her email address and school district time—and her position as Superintendent, to solicit work for her consulting firm, to set up graphic design assets for her consulting firm, and to generate contacts for her consulting firm.*

**COUNT 2: Violation of Wis. Stat. 946.12**

*All prior paragraphs are realleged and reincorporated by reference in the counts below as though fully set forth herein.*

*Wis. Stat. 19.59(3) provides that "any public officer or public employee" is guilty of a Class I felony who, "Whether by act of commission or omission, in the officer's or employee's capacity as such officer or employee exercises a discretionary power in a manner inconsistent with the duties of the officer's or employee's office or employment or the rights of others and with intent to obtain a dishonest advantage for the officer or employee or another."*

*Dr. Kerr's use of her official BDS email address, BDS working hours, and the weight and prestige her title conveys to solicit private business constitutes misuse of her discretionary power to gain dishonest advantage for her private consulting firm, Lead Greatly, LLC.*



For a full copy of the complaint, please contact [press@wisdems.org](mailto:press@wisdems.org).