

Rep. Madison: AB 245 and AB 305 fail to protect Milwaukee and Wisconsin's public school system

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MADISON - Tonight, the Assembly passed the shared revenue bill (AB 245) and a historic level of public funding for choice schools (AB 305). The Senate also passed AB 245 and AB 305. They now head to the Governor's desk.

Representative Madison (D-10) issued the following statement:

"Throughout this process I have made it clear that I would vote against any bill that creates harm in my communities at the cost of dealing with an impending financial crisis that the legislature has forced Milwaukee into. I was hoping that the Senate would send back a much better version of this bill, but unfortunately this is about the same. AB 245 ties Milwaukee's hands by stripping local autonomy all while refusing to give Milwaukee long-term financial stability. Make no mistake, Milwaukee will be back in this situation in 30 years when the sales tax expires - all while the rest of the state gets the resources they need.

Unfortunately, AB 305 and K-12 education has now been brought into the equation at the expense of our public education system. One of my predecessors, Annette Polly Williams, was the author of the first school choice legislation in the nation. I must acknowledge the history and positive intent of school choice driven by the historical disparities between Black and brown students in public education. It is important to note that in a public school system that relies on local taxes for funding, these disparities are directly related to the history of redlining and white flight in the most segregated city in America. The Speaker even referenced Polly's vision today on the floor, even though she had to distance herself from the school choice movement in the 2010s because what was supposed to be an experiment

and opportunity for low-income students of color from Milwaukee turned into a strategic divestment from our public school system.

I understand the intent behind the decisions that parents and families are currently making in order to send their young people to the best schools for their child. However, we also have to address the harm that school choice can cause children, including special education students or students with identities that are not respected in their school. Additionally, choice schools have access to private funding sources and do not need this historic investment of public funds. Most importantly, choice schools should not be the solution to discriminatory practices such as redlining or school segregation, nor were they ever intended to be a solution for students who suffer from the recurring divestment of public education that we have seen under this Republican-led legislature. Though we have a long way to go, the only way to ensure accountability of public funding and educational outcomes is to truly invest in our public schools so that every child, no matter their identity, background, or zip code, can get the quality education that they deserve.”