

Rep. Cruz: School funding lawsuit highlights Legislature's ongoing failures

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Representative Angelina Cruz, a longtime public school educator and educators union president, responded today to the lawsuit filed Monday in Eau Claire County Circuit Court challenging the state's approach to public school funding.

"It is difficult to be surprised," Cruz said, "when for nearly two decades the Legislature has shown a glaring disregard for our constitutional obligation to adequately fund public schools."

Article X of the Wisconsin Constitution states:

"The legislature shall provide by law for the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable, and such schools shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years, and no sectarian instruction shall be allowed therein."

Cruz emphasized that while the Constitution mandates funding for public schools, it does not require public funding for private schools.

"Communities across Wisconsin have repeatedly raised their own property taxes through local referenda just to keep public schools open," Cruz said. "At the same time, taxpayers are also funding private school vouchers. Despite the outcry about rising property taxes, the real issue hiding in plain sight is the state's growing investment in vouchers. We are effectively paying for two school systems — and draining public schools in the process."

Cruz said the most recent state budget underscores what she views as a continued

failure by the Legislature.

“A zero-dollar increase in general school aid is not sustainable,” she said. “What was promoted as a historic increase in special education funding has fallen short, leaving districts scrambling to fill budget gaps because actual reimbursements came in well below what was promised. Under Republican control, the Legislature has failed to guarantee even the funding levels it publicly celebrated.”

Cruz also pointed to disparities in special education reimbursement rates.

“Private voucher schools are guaranteed 90 percent reimbursement for eligible special education costs,” Cruz said. “Public schools learned in November they would receive only 35 percent reimbursement for most of this year. This widening gap is the reality educators, administrators, students, and families have been living with for nearly twenty years.”

“The constitutional directive is clear,” Cruz concluded. “What remains unclear is what it will take for the state to finally meet that obligation. But what is undeniable is that we have a serious and growing problem.”