http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/school-bus-kids-s5.jpg



Legislation attempts to reverse the increasing bill for the costly school choice and voucher programs at the expense of public schools.

MADISON - Property taxpayers have a hidden cost on their bills this month. According to the Department of Public Instruction, this hidden fee will cost the 27th Senate District $3.1 million, and upwards of $95.6 million statewide. If left unchecked, this fee – voucher schools – will increase year after year without oversight or authority.

This week Democrats introduced legislation to give the power back to taxpayers, instead of making them blindly foot the increasing bill for the costly school choice and voucher programs at the expense of public schools. Representative Sondy Pope (D-Mt.Horeb), Representative Dave Considine (D-Baraboo), and I introduced legislation to freeze the number of participants in the 3 main voucher programs and require teachers in the voucher programs to be licensed. Additionally, our bills will limit the voucher to lesser of the current payment or the school district's general aid per student, and limit voucher payments to no more than tuition charged. Additionally, Senator Janet Bewley (D-Mason) introduced legislation to require a referendum before a district faces increased property taxes from vouchers taking away aid.

These proposals would ensure that property taxpayers don't lose more to voucher operations than they would receive in state general aid per student, would ensure that voucher operations don't take in more from taxpayers than they would have received in tuition, and would give the power back to taxpayers to decide how their tax dollars are spent.



This is not the first time that Democrats attempted to increase transparency and accountability this year. In Governor Evers' budget proposal, he included several of the same proposals that we have reintroduced today. However, Republicans on the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) removed all provisions aimed at increasing the standards of voucher programs on their first vote.

Voucher school operators, on average, takes $2,618 more per student than the general aid a public school district receives. In 97% of districts statewide, property taxpayers would pay more per student to voucher schools than for their public schools, and although general aid is designed to limit the cost of public schools to property taxpayers, homeowners are on the hook for their increased taxpayer contributions to voucher programs.

Additionally, many private schools in the voucher programs charge significantly less in tuition than the voucher payments. In those cases, private schools make more from school district property taxpayers than they would have received in tuition. Choice schools often funnel these tax dollars to statewide lobby organizations that are designed to demand more from taxpayers without oversight. In other words, these voucher schools are draining resources from public schools, while profiting at property taxpayers' expense.

Our public schools are already tragically underfunded, and taxpayers are forced to raise their own taxes through referendums in order to keep their doors open. Taxpayers deserve full transparency when it comes to the unreliable voucher programs, and the legislation that we introduced this week is a step in the right direction.

As avid supporters of public education, we are proud to work alongside our Democratic

colleagues to fight back against the bad policies and burdens that taxpayers have to endure under Republican leadership. These bills are common-sense proposals that allow property taxpayers to choose whether or not they shell out hundreds of millions of dollars without oversight or authority.