



207 East Buffalo Street, Suite 325
Milwaukee, WI 53202-5774

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Contact: Christopher Ahmuty, Executive Director, (414) 272-4032, ext. 13

ACLU of Wisconsin
Statement in support of
Legislative action on public schools now.

Milwaukee, WI: On January 6, 2010 the ACLU of Wisconsin's executive director Christopher Ahmuty sent the following statement to members of the Wisconsin Legislature and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. He urged them to move beyond a perceived impasse on legislation to aid the Milwaukee Public Schools. Ahmuty's statement:

Some media, including the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Wispolitics.com, report that after a January 5th marathon hearing on Milwaukee Public Schools, the Wisconsin Legislature is unlikely to come up with a fix for the district's woes any time soon. As someone who attended the hearing for eight hours, I believe the media reports misrepresent the current situation.

While the prospect of a mayoral takeover of MPS should be dead, that doesn't mean that the Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and legislative leaders can't or won't display the kind of leadership on education that both opponents and proponents of mayoral control would welcome. Mayor Barrett, in particular, can still deliver for MPS and parents and students across Wisconsin by agreeing to legislation that would address the core issues we all face.

The school funding formula adopted by the Legislature in 1992 is a shambles and needs to be replaced. Public schools need the resources to provide an adequate education to their students. Different districts have different needs. Poor rural and urban districts (including Beloit and Racine as well as Milwaukee) have challenges that wealthier districts do not face. A new formula can help districts with concentrations of poor students, English language learners, and special needs without harming districts with more advantaged students. A good way to enhance Governor Doyle legacy on educational issues might be to revisit the 2004 recommendations of Doyle's Task Force on Educational Excellence for additional measures that would help districts across the state.

A proposal by State Senator Spencer Coggs and State Representative Tamara Grigsby could be modified to include provisions on funding that will help districts statewide, not just Milwaukee. Barrett and legislative leaders could be statesmen, if Barrett recognizes the needs of districts statewide, just as legislators must now recognize the urgent needs of MPS, not for control, but for support from all segments of the public and all parts of Wisconsin.