



Civil Rights Advocates Allege Voucher Program Discriminates on Basis of Disability

Groups Request Federal Investigation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MILWAUKEE, WI – The American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation, and Disability Rights Wisconsin filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division today, charging discriminatory practices in Milwaukee’s private voucher schools have led to an egregious segregation of students with disabilities. The complaint was filed against the State of Wisconsin, its Department of Public Instruction and two voucher schools. The groups say that Wisconsin has failed to hold taxpayer-funded private voucher schools accountable for serving children with disabilities, and has created a program that segregates and isolates children with disabilities.

“Twenty years of offering vouchers to attend private schools in Milwaukee have demonstrated that children with disabilities are not welcome in Milwaukee’s private schools,” said Jeffrey Spitzer-Resnick, attorney for Disability Rights Wisconsin. “Even worse is when these voucher schools occasionally accept children with disabilities, take their voucher funds, and then expel them without recourse leaving the family no other option than to return to Milwaukee Public Schools. In fact our complaint includes one family whose children with disabilities were not admitted to a voucher school, and another whose disabled child was kicked out of a voucher school and sent back to the public school system.”

“This failure of voucher schools to serve children with disabilities has led to the segregation of children with disabilities within Milwaukee Public Schools, while reducing resources the public school system needs to educate all students,” added Courtney Bowie, senior staff attorney with the ACLU Racial Justice Program.

“Right now only about 1.6% of voucher students have disabilities, while 19.5% of Milwaukee Public School students do,” said Karyn Rotker, senior staff attorney with the ACLU of Wisconsin. “Increasing the size of the voucher program – as the state intends to do – will only lead to even more discrimination and more segregation of children with disabilities. We hope DOJ will step in to stop that from occurring.”

Civil Rights organizations participating in the complaint:

[Disability Rights Wisconsin](#) is a private, nonprofit organization which was founded in 1977 and helps people across Wisconsin gain access to services and opportunity through its advocacy and legal expertise. Disability Rights Wisconsin regularly challenges systems and society to create positive change and improve the lives of people with disabilities.

For over 90 years, the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) has been the nation's guardian of liberty, working daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone in the United States. Read [the ACLU's Blog of Rights](#) online for commentary on civil liberties news from across the country.

The ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation is a non-profit civil liberties and civil rights organization working to protect the rights of Wisconsinites. For more on the work of the American Civil Liberties Union and Foundation of Wisconsin, visit our [webpage](#). You can also get news and opinion on civil liberties in Wisconsin on our [Cap City Liberty blog](#). Find us on [Facebook and Twitter at ACLUMadison and ACLUofWisconsin](#).

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