



ACLU of WI Urges Legislators to Reject Flawed Disability Voucher Plan

AB 110 Will Cause Unintended Consequences, Further Discrimination

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 5, 2012

CONTACT: Stacy Harbaugh, Communications Director, (608) 469-5540, media@aclu-wi.org

MADISON, WI – Today the ACLU of Wisconsin urged legislators to reject a plan that could unintentionally worsen the quality of education for students with disabilities in Wisconsin. While AB 110 would provide vouchers for students with disabilities to attend religious or private schools in Wisconsin, the bill wouldn't ensure that voucher-subsidized schools would provide adequate services. Without holding these schools to improved and consistent standards, this tax subsidy to religious and private schools would take away scarce resources from public schools.

"The ACLU of Wisconsin continues our objection to subsidizing religious and other private schools with taxpayer dollars while they refuse to be held to the same non-discrimination and accountability standards as the public school system," said Executive Director Chris Ahmuty. "Our flawed school funding formula already makes our neighborhood schools do more with less. This bill would make the problem worse by taking already limited funds away from the public school system and handing over funds to religious and private schools without assuring parents that those schools will adequately serve their children."

The ACLU of Wisconsin has had a long-held position against the school voucher or Milwaukee Parental Choice program because it is a failed scheme that is a misuse of tax dollars and doesn't advance Wisconsin toward ensuring equal and adequate education for all students. In fact, the ACLU of Wisconsin partnered with Disability Rights Wisconsin last year to file a federal disability discrimination claim against the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program because of systemic discrimination against students with disabilities who weren't adequately supported or who were outright rejected by voucher-dependent schools.

Other flaws in this bill include weak or non-existent requirements for these schools to regularly review a student's Individualized Education Plan or even provide certified teachers or services. Religious and Private schools make their own assessments about what defines special education and parents have fewer rights and remedies if their child does not receive adequate services. The per-pupil amount of the voucher is capped, but the tuition of the school that receives the voucher is not. This will lend to more systemic discrimination when parents who have the most resources use tax vouchers, while low-income families with children who have more expensive accommodation needs must choose between giving up services or staying at their neighborhood school.

All students have an equal right to schools that adequately serve their educational needs. However, this bill is structured in a way that will weaken the adequacy of public schools while at the same time giving a greater share of monetary support to religious and private schools that do not have the same standards of accountability. Expanding the voucher scheme either through this flawed disability scholarship plan or to allow for vouchers in school districts beyond Milwaukee or Racine would not provide meaningful or effective education reform in Wisconsin.

The ACLU of Wisconsin has approximately 6,500 members who support its efforts to defend the civil liberties and civil rights of all Wisconsin residents. For more on the work of the ACLU of Wisconsin, visit our [webpage](#), like us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on Twitter [@ACLUofWisconsin](#) and [@ACLUMadison](#). Read more news and opinion on civil liberties in Wisconsin on the [Forward for Liberty](#) blog.

###