



Stop Special Needs Vouchers Wisconsin

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<http://stopspecialneeds vouchers.org>

Contact: Terri Hart-Ellis, terrihar6@hotmail.com; 414-217-8999

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Late Night Special Needs Voucher Vote Shocks Families of Students with Disabilities

Milwaukee, WI – Families of students with disabilities are waking up to shocking news of the early-morning vote by the Joint Finance Committee to introduce a special needs voucher program into the state budget. Families were afforded no opportunity to express their opposition to these harmful vouchers, as the proposal was announced on Tuesday with no prior public discussion.

The families of Stop Special Needs Vouchers have strongly objected to harmful special needs voucher proposals that have repeatedly been introduced and defeated in Wisconsin. Families are deeply concerned about the lack of rights and protections for students with disabilities in private voucher schools, and the increasing drain on funding for the public schools that must accept and educate students of all abilities.

“In every special needs voucher proposal in every state, private school voucher students have had to give up their special education rights and protections,” said Terri Hart-Ellis, whose 11-year-old daughter Addie has an IEP in the Whitefish Bay school district. “And every time, the students remaining in the public schools stand to lose resources. As parents and citizens and taxpayers, we deserve a chance to make our case against these harmful vouchers. Last night's vote was a travesty.”

Kelli Simpkins, whose 12-year-old son Mickey has an IEP in the Madison school district, is dismayed by both the process and the content of the budget vote. “Why did we not hear about this underhanded proposal until 2pm on Tuesday afternoon?” she asked. “Our voices have been silenced by budgetary sneak attack. Legislators know that parents all over Wisconsin, not to mention every disability organization in the state, have powerful objections to special needs vouchers – but somehow it didn't seem to matter.”

Objections from families include not only the lack of rights and protection in voucher schools and the loss of resources for students in public schools, but also the flood of shady-operator schools that will emerge to take advantage of this new source of public funding. Parents remember all too well the cautionary tale of Lifeskills Academy of Milwaukee, the voucher school that suddenly fled the state in December 2013, leaving 66 Wisconsin students stranded and poorly educated. Lifeskills Academy reinvented themselves as a special needs voucher school in Florida, where they are still operating today.

The special needs vouchers do not belong in the budget, and do not belong in Wisconsin.

Stop Special Needs Vouchers is comprised of Wisconsin families committed to quality inclusive public education and to stopping harmful special needs vouchers.

For more background on concerns about special needs vouchers in Wisconsin, see:

<http://tinyurl.com/coqrrsn>

For more information on Stop Special Needs Vouchers, a parent-led statewide grassroots group, see:

Facebook page -- <https://www.facebook.com/StopSpecialNeedsVouchers>

Web site -- <http://www.stopspecialneeds vouchers.org>

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