



# Sample Letter

## Referenda Restriction Bills

(Date)

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
Wisconsin State (Senate/Assembly)  
Wisconsin State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear (Senator/Representative) \_\_\_\_\_:

Several Senate and Assembly Republicans have introduced a package of six legislative bills to place various restrictions on school district referenda. These restrictions would affect both referenda to authorize debt and to exceed revenue limits and would include:

- eliminating recurring referenda to exceed the revenue limits, limiting the duration of non-recurring referendums to exceed the revenue limits to five-years, and retroactively taking away a district's revenue authority from an already approved recurring referendum after five years;
- requiring school boards to hold school referendums only in conjunction with the April Spring election and November general election;
- limiting when school boards could vote on an initial borrowing resolution and attempting to transfer board powers in this area to the annual meeting; and
- requiring school boards to include in the initial borrowing resolution and in the referendum question and notice of election the total amount of debt to be issued, the total amount of interest and related debt service costs to be incurred, and the sum of the principal, interest, and related debt service costs.

As you may know, when revenue limits were imposed on school boards in 1993, it was understood that if a school board did not receive adequate revenues under the revenue limit it could always ask its voters to approve a referendum to exceed the revenue limits by a given amount on either a temporary (non-recurring) or permanent (recurring) basis.

Because the State of Wisconsin has not provided inflationary increases in state aid or local revenue authority, school boards have come to rely on periodic referenda to maintain programming and, in some cases, to continue to exist. We fear these bills will further exacerbate the trend of creating "Haves" who can pass referenda and "Have Nots" who cannot with the result that opportunities for students will be determined by their zip code more than ever.

Referenda can provide an opportunity for a community to have a very focused and robust conversation about what it wants its public schools to be. School boards propose referenda because they believe doing so is in the best educational interests of the students and communities they represent.

We do not know why these bills are necessary. Voting is not a difficult process and voters in Wisconsin are intelligent. They do not need to be protected from themselves. If they do not support a referendum, they can vote no.

These bills are anti-local control and do not show trust in locally-elected officials. The state should provide maximum authority and flexibility to our local school boards to manage the affairs of their school districts.

We urge you to oppose this package and would like to know what your position is on these bills. We look forward to working with you on this issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

**(Local School Board)**

cc: Wisconsin Association of School Boards