

Jerry Fiene
Executive Director
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Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Finance:

On April 8, 2013, I provided testimony to the Committee on the impact of AB40 on rural school districts throughout the state. This was followed up with specific and detailed testimony to the Senate Committee on Rural Issues on May 1, 2013 that illustrated the serious consequences of AB40 on rural schools and taxpayers.

I applaud the motion passed by the Committee to establish a Task Force on Rural School Issues to address the long-term challenges facing rural schools. However, relief for rural school districts cannot wait for future recommendations. **Immediate help is needed and I implore you to provide at least a \$200 per pupil increase in the revenue limit along with a corresponding increase in general aid.** Additional adjustments to transportation and sparsity aids would help to mitigate the devastating reductions rural school districts have made directly to their classrooms and student opportunities.

The establishment of independent charters, coupled with severe restrictions placed on school district instrumentality charters, will have a dramatic impact on rural school districts and their taxpayers. Financial support for independent charters will disproportionately affect the highly-aided rural school districts whose taxpayers have the least ability to pay the increased costs. **Please remove or significantly modify all language regarding independent and instrumentality charter schools from the budget bill.**

The expansion of private school vouchers beyond Milwaukee also negatively impacts rural school districts throughout the state. When we are struggling to adequately fund our public school system, how can we justify funding an expanded voucher program that has not shown to improve student achievement compared to public schools? There are so many issues and unanswered questions surrounding the ways school districts are selected to be eligible for vouchers, the income eligibility requirement for voucher families, the accountability of voucher schools and the effectiveness of voucher schools that **all provisions regarding vouchers should absolutely be removed from the budget and debated as separate legislation.**

You have the very important task of making the critical decisions that will have great impact on the future of education in our state. I urge you to focus your support on strengthening our public school system and providing the resources that will allow the 250 rural school districts in our state to provide a quality education and equitable opportunities to the students they serve.

Sincerely,

Jerry Fiene
Executive Director
Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance

The Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance is a statewide organization of rural school districts, technical colleges, universities, CESAs, public libraries, businesses and individuals focused on sustaining and strengthening rural school districts and rural communities throughout the state.