



## TESTIMONY TO THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Representative Murphy and Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities:

Thank you for this opportunity to share our perspective on the impact of AB64 on rural school districts throughout the state. I am Jerry Fiene, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, a statewide organization representing administrators, board of education members, teachers and community members from rural school districts. Our membership of 175 includes school districts, CESAs and ten of our state's technical colleges.

Our organization opposes this bill which has the potential of inflicting additional damage to schools that are the heart and center of their rural community. Rural communities are proud of their schools and currently the locally elected school boards work together with their administrators, teachers and neighboring technical colleges to provide the best education possible for all of their children with the limited resources they have available to them.

Our greatest concern is that the funding mechanism for these newly created independent charters as this bill is drafted will be similar to the current 2R Charter Schools in Milwaukee. This year 1.5% of every school district's general state aids for a total of over \$68 million are being deducted to pay for these charters. This can be tens of thousands of dollars for even a small, rural district. In almost all districts this deduction is being made up by an increase of the same amount in the local property taxes. Rural districts need every penny available in their revenue limit, in fact, a greater number of rural districts each year are dependent on additional funds from referenda to exceed revenue limits in order to maintain existing and essential programs for their students and keep their doors open.

AB64 will surely and dramatically increase the deductions from rural districts' state aids in order to pay for the newly created independent charters statewide resulting in further increases to the local property taxes. It doesn't make a difference if the independent charter school is located anywhere near your school district, you still have the same aid deduction. The real irony is that the property poorest districts in the state, which are most dependent on state aid, will be the ones that will proportionally pay the most to support the independent charters.

We are not aware of technical colleges that are seeking this chartering authority as a means of establishing schools that focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics or on occupational education and training. I can tell you that excellent examples of collaborative efforts and partnerships have been developed on a regional basis by local school districts and technical colleges, such as the Woodlands and Northwoods Regional Technical Academies in partnership with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College and the Central Wisconsin Academies in partnership with Northcentral Technical College. These are efforts that truly provide the choices that this legislation is trying to promote and hold great promise to strengthen our rural school districts.

It is efforts like these that promote collaboration and not competition that create a win-win environment not a win-lose environment that we strongly support. The greatest obstacle to expansion of these efforts is start-up funding. Our neighbor to the southwest, the state of Iowa, has found ways to financially support the start-up of such cooperative efforts between rural schools and community colleges and we encourage you to find ways we can also move in this positive direction in Wisconsin. We can and should continue to advance efforts that support STEM and occupational education. Then the real winners will be our rural youth no matter where they live.

Thank you for your service and your efforts.