

**SCHOOL DISTRICT OF TOMAHAWK
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL REFERENDA RESTRICTIONS**

WHEREAS, State Sen. Duey Stroebel (Cedarburg) and State Rep. Michael Schraa (Oshkosh) have introduced legislation (Assembly Bill 481/Senate Bill 355) to place restrictions on school district referenda ballot dates and implement a 2 year waiting period following failed referenda (recently reduced to 1 year); and

WHEREAS, under current law, a school referendum can coincide with a primary election, general election, or a special election can be called specifically for the referendum. Under this bill, a school district referendum would have to coincide with a regularly scheduled Spring or Fall general election; and

WHEREAS, under current law, there is no limitation on whether, and how frequently, a referendum may be placed before voters. This bill would prevent a school board from bringing a new referendum request for two years if a referendum is voted down; and

WHEREAS, the bill is anti-local control and does not show trust in locally-elected officials; and

WHEREAS, with state-imposed revenue limits on school districts frozen for the entire two-year state budget cycle for the first time ever, referenda are the only way many districts can access resources. This proposal will significantly impact declining enrollment districts which comprise over 60 percent of Wisconsin school districts. Most seriously affected will be small, rural school districts which lack economies of scale and have few places to make cuts. Many of these districts have come to rely on periodic referenda to maintain programming and, in some cases, to continue to exist. Legislators should know that supporting this bill could have the effect of forcing districts to consider dissolving; and

WHEREAS, the bill will further exacerbate the trend of creating “Haves” who can pass referenda and “Have Nots” who cannot. Opportunities for students will further be determined by their zip code; and

WHEREAS, the bill is extremely restrictive and inflexible for school boards – under the bill in odd-numbered years boards will only have one opportunity to go to referendum (in the spring). If that referendum fails, boards will have to wait two years to the next odd-numbered year where once again there will only be one opportunity. In a state budget year (an odd-numbered year with only an April general election) a district would have to wait until the following spring to react to funding decisions made by the state; and

WHEREAS, the bill is extremely restrictive and inflexible for school boards in another way as well – it also affects a variety of other funding mechanisms used by

school boards to help them manage their finances, such as short-term borrowing, state trust fund loans, promissory notes and other borrowing or issuance of bonds. It provides that, if a school board applies or adopts a resolution to use any of these funding mechanisms and it is rejected by a majority of the electors of the school district, the school board may not use any of these mechanisms for two consecutive 365-day periods. When the Legislature adopted Act 10, it provided a number of “tools” to school boards to help them better manage their finances. This bill proposes taking away “tools” districts use to help them manage their finances; and

WHEREAS, 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 education interested of the students and communities they represent; and

WHEREAS, The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) has formally adopted a policy resolution (Resolution 1.25) stating that “The WASB opposes limits on scheduling referenda.”

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Tomahawk Board of Education calls on Gov. Walker, Sen. Tiffany and Rep. Czaja to oppose this legislation that would further curtail the already very limited set of revenue options available to Wisconsin school boards.

Adopted and recorded :

Cathy Meyer, President

Cathy Schmit, Vice-President

Curtis Powell, Treasurer

Ken Dirks, Secretary

Cherie Hafeman, Member

Dick Huseby, Member

Cherie Krueger, Member

Tyler Stevenson, Member

Kay Kissenger-Wolf, Member