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# BARBARA DITTRICH

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 38<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

January 4, 2024

## Assembly Committee on Education

**Rep. Dittrich Testimony on AB 638** – requiring school boards to make textbooks, curricula, and instructional materials available for inspection by school district residents

Thank you Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Education for hearing Assembly Bill 638 (AB 638) today. This bill is vital in restoring the relationship between parents and school districts. I believe we have seen an outcry from parents around our state, and frankly around the country, regarding the lack of transparency in our public schools when it comes to materials being used in the classroom.

I have often said that when the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns took classrooms and instruction online, it allowed parents greater access to what their children were learning. Unfortunately, in some instances, the materials being used were not deemed appropriate, either by parents or basic societal decency. This resulted in the outcry we have seen in our local school board meetings, the local and national news, and social media. Angry parents rose up in protest in attempts to protect their children and gain a better understanding of what their children were being taught. Too often they ran into roadblocks from both school boards and instructors who felt they were being personally attacked.

This bill is an attempt to heal that rift and provide a structure for requesting and providing materials so both sides have a framework in which to operate. AB 638 would allow school district residents to present a written request to view materials to the school board. The respective school board would then have 14 days to comply with the request to inspect a textbook, curriculum, or instructional materials. Finally, school boards must adopt procedures to ensure compliance occurs within 14 days. This establishes a time frame that with which school districts must respond to and fulfill a request, gives parameters to what requests must be fulfilled and what is too far reaching, and how the requests must be fulfilled. The purpose is to make certain parents that want to know precisely what their children are being taught, while also taking teachers out of the firing line. Children have a much richer educational experience when educators and families can work together instead of engaging in vitriol and rhetoric.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions for the committee.



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

**DAN KNODL**

STATE SENATOR • 8<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

**Assembly Bill 638**

Public Testimony

Assembly Committee on Education

January 4, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Kitchens and members of this committee, for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 638.

This bill creates transparency protections for the residents of school districts who wish to review curricula or instructional materials. Specifically, it sets a 14-day time frame for a school district to comply with such a request, along with requiring the school board to establish protocols for fulfilling these requests.

I have personal experience with requesting curriculum materials, as I have submitted open records requests to my local school district for course materials. The process for requesting this information can vary from district to district, and this bill ensures the appropriate guardrails are in place so all parents and taxpayers across the state can access the content that schoolchildren encounter in the classroom.

This bill also requires school boards to post the adopted list of textbooks on the school district's website. It is important to note that while this is a curriculum transparency bill, this is not a reintroduction of Assembly Bill 488 from last session, which would have required the posting of the instructional materials themselves on the school district's home page. This bill strikes a balance that guarantees transparency and accountability.

I would like to thank Representative Dittrich for her work on this issue in the Assembly. Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposed legislation.