

Assembly Bill 553

Dr. Kristine Gilmore, Superintendent, D.C. Everest Area School District

12/19/19

Good morning Chairman Thiesfeldt and Education Committee Members.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony regarding Assembly Bill 553.

I am Kristine Gilmore, the proud Superintendent of the D.C. Everest School District for the past 17 years. The D.C. Everest School District serves approximately 6,000 students from 12 municipalities surrounding the Wausau area. Just like so many districts across the state, our schools are the pride of the community. We have 14 facilities open most days from 6 a.m.-10 p.m. Servicing our students during the day and our residents through a robust community education program in the evenings.

D.C. Everest is rather young, becoming a District in 1953 and grew rapidly through the past 50 years. Because of this timeline, many of our schools and their infrastructures have aged at the same time. The District has had three referendums during my time, but all have been to add schools or space for increasing enrollment. Due to limited resources that we prioritized for student learning, over time we found ourselves with inefficient lighting, boilers, windows, roofs, and poor air quality and temperature control.

During the 2017-2018 school year, we brought together a group of 50+ constituents comprised of students, parents, and local business leaders. After touring schools, studying our infrastructure assessment, and financial status, they recommended supporting an energy efficiency proposal along with a separate referendum to deal with space and updating needs. Our School Board believed the energy efficiency exemption was a great way to fix current issues and proactively update our facilities, while generating energy savings with minimal tax impact. Because we believe in transparency to our community, a public meeting was held, along with a 30-day petition period. We also surveyed the community regarding our facilities and infrastructure. We heard overwhelming positive

feedback that people wanted us to take care of the existing schools so they may last into the future.

After hosting 42 public informational meetings on the energy efficiency projects and our referendum – our referendum passed with 71% support. I happily report that last spring we started our energy efficiency projects, as well as the referendum work. These infrastructure projects are often not flashy. However, lighting, reliable temperature and improved air quality greatly impacts students' learning ability. Just ask any of our teachers at our 900-student, 1953 built Junior High without air conditioning. How easy is it to teach on a warm fall or spring day where the room temperature hits the upper 80's? You can imagine how they feel and it smells.

Our locally elected school boards are held accountable to make fiscal decisions based not only on the school district's needs, but also on the ability to balance the cost to the local taxpayer. For example, if the energy efficiency bill is reinstated, a district could implement an LED lighting project during a year with a projected mill rate decrease, witness an energy savings from those lighting units, use that savings to pay down debt, and provide students with a better learning environment. This bill also clearly defines the rules and regulations to ensure that the process is transparent and uniform, while including districts' taxpayers' voice. And finally, allows school boards local control to wisely manage maintenance and infrastructure decisions around sound fiscal practice.

Today I am here asking you to support Assembly Bill 553 and reinstate the energy efficiency program to ensure that large and small, urban, suburban, and rural school districts have the financial capability to proactively take care of maintenance and facility needs, rather than waiting for larger, more expensive building projects in the future.

Thank you for listening to my thoughts and experiences. I'd be happy to answer any questions.