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Mayor Devine and Esteemed members of the West Allis Common Council,

Please accept this testimony as my official public comment on File #2024-0683, Conditional Use Permit for Woodlands School, a proposed K-8 elementary school, at 1526 S. 72nd St. As a County Supervisor, homeowner, taxpayer, and parent of two future West Allis-West Milwaukee School District (WAWM) students, I must respectfully voice my opposition to this project.

First, West Allis is not short of K-8 educational options. In addition to WAWM schools, there are multiple private, religious options for parents to consider, as well as open enrollment applications to nearby school districts. When it comes to public schools, which receive most of their funding from taxpayers, including state and federal aids as well as local property taxes, there has been recognition in recent years of demographic trends that have reduced the number of K-12 students. Such has been the reduction in recent years that the district has had to resort to consolidation and closing of schools.

Because public schools in Wisconsin are subject to per-pupil revenue limits, this reduction in school-age children presents not just logistical but significant financial challenges for WAWM schools. Voters are being asked to take up two referendum questions this November to allow the district to continue to deliver a safe learning environment and quality public education to every student. Simply put, approving this Conditional Use Permit (CUP) makes it harder for WAWM to do its job. By directly competing with WAWM schools for a limited pool of students, we are stretching a limited set of public education dollars further than they ought to be stretched.

Now, there are some who might not care that adding yet another school to the current milieu creates funding challenges for WAWM so long as the school that is being added is high-performing. Unfortunately, if you look at the State Department of Public Instruction (DPI) report cards, that isn't necessarily the case. It is my understanding that this operator, The Woodlands Schools, intends to combine two existing Milwaukee charter schools into a single campus in West Allis. While one of these campuses stacks up favorably to WAWM schools in its most recent state report card, the operator's State Street campus has seen its overall score plummet from 78.4 – Exceeds expectations in 2020-21 to 47.0 – Fails to meet expectations in 2022-23.

As a former public school special education aide at Milwaukee Public Schools, I know as well as anyone that report cards and standardized tests do not offer a full picture of the value or quality of education at our public schools. However, given the financial implications of forcing WAWM to compete for a

population of students that is steady at best with a private operator, it's useful to have some frame of reference as we consider our options.

Simply put, our West Allis community doesn't need more schools – we need to invest more in the public schools we already have, which have become increasingly vulnerable due to a lack of investment from the state. As a County Supervisor, part of my job is to ensure my constituents' tax dollars are invested wisely. In my view, any decision we make which endangers our local public schools is a poor choice. As a parent, I want my kids to have the best education possible. Approving this application puts the quality of their education at risk.

In Service,  
Justin Bielinski