

4/30/69 -

*MJC Position on Public Funds  
to Private and Parochial Schools.*

Since 1939 the Milwaukee Jewish Council has served as the human relations and educational agency of the Jewish community of Milwaukee. Its constituent organizations are the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, Jewish Labor Committee and the Jewish War Veterans. The work of the Council is dedicated to full and equal opportunity in a free society for all Americans without regard to race or religion. In that regard, we have supported all programs which would enhance educational opportunity in our public schools. We believe the vitality of public education is essential to our continuing national unity even while we take great pride in our religious, racial and ethnic diversity.

We recognize and support the right of citizens to provide religiously related educations for their children. The Jewish community has created its religiously related schools but we believe, these institutions, which serve a private religious purpose, are the responsibility not of government but of our own religious community.

We wish to categorically state our opposition to those proposals before the Wisconsin State legislature (including Senate Bill 346) which propose the payment of state funds to the parents of children or to children who attend religiously related and private schools. Our opposition is based on the following considerations:

- I. PUBLIC FUNDS TO SUPPORT RELIGIOUSLY RELATED SCHOOLS IS A VIOLATION OF THE FEDERAL AND STATE CONSTITUTIONS. The Milwaukee Jewish Council believes that it is not possible to draw a line between the religious and secular elements of a parochial school education. Religious leaders of these faiths which support parochial school systems have made clear that the religious purpose of the parochial school is an integral part of the total educational experience. Accordingly, proposals to make grants directly to parochial school children or their parents are merely a device to avoid the State and Federal Constitutional prohibitions against providing state funds for religious purposes. Article I, Section 18 of the Wisconsin Constitution

provides "nor shall any money be drawn from the Treasury for the benefit of religious societies or religious or theological seminaries." Article I of the United States Constitution provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

We believe Senate Bill 346 and similar proposals before the state legislature to be violation of the above sections of our State and Federal Constitutions. These have been the basis of religious liberty in our Nation and in our State.

II. A SYSTEM OF STATE GRANTS TO PARENTS OF PRIVATE SCHOOL CHILDREN THREATENS THE VERY FUTURE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION. Our public school systems, especially those in our major cities face deep social and financial difficulties. They have the difficult responsibility of meeting the educational needs of the disadvantaged with inadequate financial resources. The problem is heightened by the flight of middleclass children from the city's public school systems for sanctuary in suburban or private school systems -- both religious and secular.

The United States Commission on Civil Rights in its report "Racial Isolation in the Public Schools (1967)" said as follows:

"Private and parochial school enrollment which is overwhelming white, also is a significant factor in the increasing separation of white and Negro school children".

Also commenting on a national trend, the report said

"Nearly 1/3 more elementary school students in the cities attend non-public schools than in the suburbs. Almost all of them are white. In the larger metropolitan areas, the trend is more pronounced. A much higher proportion of white city students than white suburban students attend private and parochial elementary schools. Non-whites in these metropolitan areas, whether in cities or suburbs, attend public schools almost exclusively".

Thus there is a clear relationship between the decline of public education and the growing demands of private schools. If the state legislature establishes the precedent of giving ~~us~~ \$1.00 in public funds for the support of private education, they may be taking a decision which could signal the beginning of the end of public education in our state. Many black children in the inner city attend parochial schools only because public education has failed them. It is in the public schools where the educational investment of the people of Wisconsin should be given priority.

III. PROVIDING STATE FUNDS TO RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS WILL CREATE A BASIS FOR STATE INTRUSION INTO RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS. Senate Bill 346 recognizes that public support for parochial and private schools can hasten the development of racial segregation in education. It therefore proposes that religious schools, in order to be eligible for state grants, must declare that they are in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and further the school must provide a statement that any resident child will be admitted without regard to race, creed, color or national origin. We believe this is a totally unwarranted intrusion by the state into the character of a religious institution. This stipulation would treat differentially those institutions which properly have a right to remain religiously homogenous as against those whose religious beliefs permit the enrollment of children not of the faith of the given religious school. Indeed, the vast majority of black children in Wisconsin do not have access to religious schools as a matter of religious right because they are not of the religious communities which support parochial school systems in our state. The involvement of the state in the regulation of the character of the student body in a religious school is a clear threat to religious freedom.

IV. THESE PROPOSALS ARE FISCALLY DISCRIMINATORY AND UNWISE. At a time when our public schools are financially starved, it would be contrary to the public interest to provide across the board grants to all private schools regardless

of need. Beneficiaries of these grants would include well to do parents of children in posh private boarding schools as well as religious schools in well to do suburban communities throughout the state. It is a delusion to believe that state funds for parochial schools will <sup>in the long run</sup> save the people's money. The system of grants provided in Senate Bill 346 is but a beginning. Indeed, legislation has already been introduced which provides for a program of state aid to all private schools to cover the full cost of what is described as "secular" education in religious schools. The inevitable extension of a full and equal status for private schools compared to public schools can only result in far greater costs for education. It will also result in factionalized and splintered educational systems which in the end will result not only in poor and divisive education but also in the least effective use of our limited resources.

The Milwaukee Jewish Council is mindful of the plight of some private religiously related schools which serve low income families. We believe it is possible to meet the needs of children in these schools in a way which is both constitutional and not destructive of public education. We have in mind for example the provisions of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which provide for special educational services and arrangements in which pupils in private schools can also participate. These special services can be provided through dual enrollment, through educational radio and television or mobile educational services and equipment. Special arrangements may include broadened health services, school breakfasts for poor children, and guidance and counseling. These services are administered under public auspices and should be more fully exploited for the benefit of children of low income families.