

Kathryn Wegner  
Statement to the Citizens' League on PILOTS  
July 27, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Kathryn Wegner. I am a parent of two children at Groveland Park Elementary (it's usually known by its proximity to Snuffy's Malt Shop). It's not an exaggeration to say that a major attraction for us in moving to St. Paul was its high quality public schools. After living in Chicago for many years, we were eager to live in a city with strong and consistent public schools. Turns out our next-door neighbors—also with elementary aged children—also moved from Chicago for the public schools.

We bought our first house, a little bungalow on a street with many families. One mother is an Allina Labor & Delivery nurse. Another is in admin at local non-profit. Another one works at the Veteran's Hospital. State government, St. Thomas, Hamline University, a local Catholic school, Target and 3M round out the list of the employers of the public school families on my block. I bring this up because our city's young families directly benefit from good public schools, as do our corporations and non-profits who are easily able to attract and retain employees to a city with many strong public services.

This is why we must keep PILOTS on the table as a viable way to increase revenue for our public schools. Look, we know that state revenue has diminished because Minnesota's corporations are not paying their fair share. (Corporate tax rates have fallen dramatically in the past 20 years.) We're working on this issue on many fronts, and getting large private colleges and hospitals to consider PILOTS is one thing that might help. We're not asking them to contribute more than they can or to anything they don't benefit from. In education, money matters.

Back to Groveland Park Elementary. Three years ago, children had a full-time music teacher. Kindergarteners had a teacher and a teacher's aide in the classroom every day. Three years ago, there was an amazing Gifted and Talented teacher who brought challenging inquiry projects into the classroom. Three years ago, the lunchroom was properly staffed, so kids had adults around to help solve conflicts and zip up coats. In education, money matters.

We can't let St. Paul become a divided city where executives send their children to private schools, the middle-class fight tooth & nail for a spot at a district-wide magnet, and the poor are left in increasingly segregated and resource starved schools. That's not the Minnesota we believe in.

Remember, in education money matters. \$50,000 means that a principal doesn't have to choose whether to cut the K-5 music or science teacher.

That's why we are so interested in PILOTs. You may have noticed that parents and teachers have been at every meeting here, even though we have been told that this task force is not considering education. We were surprised at the last meeting when this group endorsed the statement that PILOTs should be limited to city services, and not involve schools.

This is an important discussion to have, and we appreciate the opportunity to speak here today, but five minutes is not enough time for you to make decisions that impact the education of my kids and the almost 40,000 other children who attend public schools in St. Paul, three quarters of whom are students of color.

We ask that the Task Force stick to your original scope about just looking at city services, and leave education funding to the stakeholders in our schools.

PILOTS are a viable opportunity for increasing school revenue. Should this happen, our large private colleges and hospitals will rest assured knowing that they've chipped in their fair share, for their employees, the city, and for the common good.

Thank you.