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Common Council President

15th District Alderman

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**Willie L. Hines, Jr.**  
*City of Milwaukee Common Council*

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January 7, 2011

Dr. Michael Bonds  
President, Milwaukee Board of School Directors  
5225 W. Vliet St.  
P.O. Box 2181  
Milwaukee, WI 53208

President Bonds:

I am in receipt of your recent letter, which raises concerns about the official position that the City of Milwaukee took last year, when the Common Council voted 15-0 to lobby State of Wisconsin lawmakers and “seek to facilitate the transfer of surplus Milwaukee Public Schools buildings.” Thank you for taking the time to express these concerns to me directly.

As an elected representative for the City of Milwaukee, the quality of education that our children receive is a primary concern of mine. I am an MPS parent, graduate and longtime supporter. I value the commitment and mission of MPS and have often touted your successes. It is because I care deeply about the future of public education in Milwaukee that I have taken certain positions, including joining all of my aldermanic colleagues in working to occupy long-vacant facilities with high-achieving charter schools.

Charter schools, whether they partner with MPS, UW-Milwaukee, MATC or the City of Milwaukee are indeed public schools, and they are part of our educational ecosystem. I respectfully, yet vehemently, disagree with your assertion that making vacant, taxpayer-owned facilities available for high-achieving charter schools would somehow hurt racial minorities in poverty.

Your letter inquires about “professional courtesy” and suggests that I should have made the MPS Board aware of the City’s official position on this issue. Superintendent Thornton and I did speak about the City of Milwaukee resolution, which is part of our overall legislative package. While we were not in complete agreement, the discussion was both respectful and productive.

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The Coca-Cola Company analogy in your letter falls short for several reasons, but mostly because MPS is not a private company. Not one of these empty school buildings belongs to you, me or the School Board. They belong to all of us – the taxpayers. In light of that fact, taxpayer dollars must be used responsibly and these buildings should be put to use, ideally to house high-performing schools. If a private-sector analogy must be employed, then Milwaukee’s own MillerCoors is more appropriate. Recognizing existing market challenges, these two companies harnessed their combined resources to forge an even stronger, more successful entity. I believe that educational options for all Milwaukee’s children would be enhanced in a similar fashion if the MPS District saw exceptional charter schools as allies, rather than adversaries.

As to your point about vacant land and buildings owned by the City of Milwaukee, you are exactly correct: We should make these properties available to “people and businesses free of charge.” In fact, we already do. The City of Milwaukee sells surplus properties to private citizens and entrepreneurs for just \$1. You may know that last year I sponsored legislation furthering this practice so that flood victims could purchase city-owned homes for \$1, as well. Multiple families are currently engaged in this process, and several citizens have thanked me personally for this initiative. Over the years, I have done much to address each of your other 13 points, and you can be sure that I will only be more aggressive in the future.

The Wisconsin Legislature appears ready to respond to the City of Milwaukee’s official lobbying position on vacant MPS buildings. I am certain that the change in legislation will be beneficial for all of us, most notably our children who are deserving of equal access to outstanding schools in their own neighborhoods.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. L. Hines, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Willie L. Hines, Jr.  
Alderman, 15<sup>th</sup> District  
President, Common Council