Good morning Chairman Cowles and Committee members. I am Bryce Bird and I am currently the District Administrator for the Prairie du Chien school district. I have been in school leadership positions for over 30 years and was able to utilize the energy exemption successfully at the Riverdale School District as their district administrator. We were a district that had some levy authority and were able to use the tool to upgrade our infrastructure with minimal tax impact.

The level of facility funding available to districts in fund 10 is limited and does not allow districts to renew their infrastructure proactively, but rather leads to short term repair decisions that are based on the very limited budget. This often leads to additional budget costs occurring every year, because the root cause of the system is not addressed.

The energy efficiency exemption was a great way to proactively update our facilities and fund the work using savings generated by the project. The great news about the program, unlike a referendum project, is it does require a payback report and transparency to the public with a 30-day petition period where public meetings are held to explain the project and the financial impact. The public can weigh in with a petition on the project if they are not comfortable with the project.

Regular facility maintenance is vital and very necessary. The legislature exempted the cost of qualifying energy efficiency projects from the revenue limits because it incentivizes school districts to assume these cost-saving projects today, rather than waiting for larger, more expensive building projects in the future.

It is important that the legislature reinstate the program to ensure school districts are not put in a position that would require them defer regular maintenance projects because they don’t have a way to finance or pay for these needs inside of their current Fund 10 funding levels.

Senate Bill 494 also more clearly defines what school districts need to do to use the exemption and makes the process more transparent and uniform. Removing the moratorium will ensure that school districts can plan for regular facility maintenance and upgrades and know they have this program as an option to finance the work.

I’d be happy to answer any questions about my experience using the energy exemption program during my career.