



## Stop Special Needs Vouchers Wisconsin

<https://www.facebook.com/StopSpecialNeedsVouchers>

<http://stopspecialneeds vouchers.blogspot.com>

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Disability Slurs Have No Place in Public Discourse, Sen. Johnson**

Madison, WI – Wisconsin families of students with disabilities are still picking their jaws up off the floor, after reading that Senator Ron Johnson used the following slur in reference to Milwaukee students in a radio interview on Monday: “those idiot inner-city kids.”

Once upon a time, the term “idiot” was a medical term of art for individuals with profound cognitive disabilities. However, it became an insulting pejorative and has long been abandoned by the medical community. Parents of students with disabilities would overwhelmingly prefer that the term disappear altogether. For families where cognitive disability is at issue, the term harkens back to a time where such children received no education at all, but lived out their lives apart from their families in segregated institutions.

Even more disturbing was the context in which Sen. Johnson used the term.

The interview in which Sen. Johnson spoke those words was in context of his new-found concern regarding an ongoing investigation by the Department of Justice in response to a 2011 complaint by the American Civil Liberties Union and Disability Rights Wisconsin, which highlights multiple families’ experiences of disability discrimination in voucher schools. Rather than taking up the cause of the families whose students experienced such discrimination, Sen. Johnson has instead been criticizing the investigation. The use of the phrase “those idiot inner-city kids” adds further insult to that injury.

Terri Hart-Ellis, whose 12-year-old daughter Addie has an IEP in the Whitefish Bay school district, struggled to find polite words to frame her outrage on her daughter’s behalf. Finally, shaking her head, she simply said: “No, Senator Johnson. Just... no.”

Stop Special Needs Vouchers requests an apology from Senator Johnson on behalf of students with disabilities statewide, an apology that acknowledges the magnitude of the harm caused by language that reinforces discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

For more background on concerns about special needs vouchers in Wisconsin, see:

<http://tinyurl.com/coqrrsn>

For more information on Stop Special Needs Vouchers, a parent-led statewide grassroots group, see: -- Facebook page -- <https://www.facebook.com/StopSpecialNeedsVouchers>

Web site -- <http://www.stopspecialneeds vouchers.org>

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*Stop Special Needs Vouchers is comprised of Wisconsin families committed to quality inclusive public education and to stopping harmful special needs vouchers.*