



## **Open Meeting Law Proposal Would Amend Constitution To Close Legislature's Loophole**

Rep. Jon Richards (D-Milwaukee) and Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca introduced a constitutional amendment on July 7 to close a loophole in Wisconsin's open meetings law they say Republican lawmakers exploited in order to pass a highly controversial collective bargaining bill that took away 50 years of workers' rights.

"The legislature must be held to the same standards of openness and transparency as city councils, school boards and all other government agencies," Richards said. "State lawmakers should not be allowed to place themselves above the law and subvert the open meetings law. The court's decision now forces us to clarify state law in this area."

Last month, the Wisconsin Supreme Court refused to decide whether legislative leaders violated the state's open meetings law when they rushed to pass a bill that eliminated most collective bargaining rights for public workers. As a result of the ruling, the legislature is now free follow its own rules when it comes to open meetings-even if those rules violate the law or provide no public notice of a meeting.

"In our democracy, the public has a fundamental right to participate in government and have a seat at the table when decisions are made," Richards said. "The constitutional amendment we are introducing takes an important first step to preserving the people's right to an open government so they can monitor the people's business."

The amendment would require the legislature to enact laws requiring reasonable notice of and public access to meetings of the Legislature and other government bodies. It makes legislators subject to citations and civil penalties for violating the law. In order to be ratified, constitutional amendments must pass the Legislature in two successive legislative sessions, and be approved by voters in a statewide referendum.

Representatives of several citizen advocacy and open government organizations joined the democratic lawmakers at the State Capitol news conference to show their support for the measure, including: Christa Westerberg of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council; Jay Heck, Executive Director of Common Cause in Wisconsin; and Andrea Kaminski, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Fund.