

TO: All members of the PA House and Senate
FROM: Concerned Education Stakeholders and Advocates
SUBJECT: Opposition to School Vouchers
DATE: May 7, 2024

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we respectfully urge you to oppose any additional public funding for private and religious school vouchers in the 2024-2025 state budget.

There should be **no discussion of sending additional taxpayer money to private and religious schools until the commonwealth's system for funding public education is in constitutional compliance.**

In addition, Pennsylvania already spends \$470 million each year on vouchers for private and religious schools through the notoriously unaccountable Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs.

The EITC and OSTC private school voucher programs have received more than \$2.6 billion in diverted taxes since 2001, yet little to nothing is known about which students have benefited from these vouchers or about the educational outcomes of students who have received them. In addition, lax reporting standards and an absence of legislative oversight and public auditing in the current law leave no safeguard against the misuse of tax dollars by scholarship organizations that have been allowed to keep up to 20 percent for administrative costs for more than two decades.

A 2022 report from the Independent Fiscal Office focused on the EITC and OSTC programs found that, "... it is not possible to comment on whether state funds have been used effectively due to lack of general and specific outcome data."

It is ironic that some policymakers' annual focus on performance-based budgeting and/or outcomes in K-12 public schools somehow always seems to exclude the EITC and OSTC programs — by the very proponents of these same initiatives.

The commonwealth must conduct a thorough examination of Pennsylvania's existing EITC and OSTC voucher programs and taxpayers must know, based on data, that the current funds are producing positive educational outcomes before there is any discussion of increasing funding for the EITC or OSTC programs or creating a new, duplicative voucher program, such as the proposed PASS or Lifeline Scholarship programs.

Further, Pennsylvania must codify explicit anti-discrimination protections and strong enforcement mechanisms in the EITC and OSTC school voucher law and in all state laws that govern private schools that choose to accept voucher funding to ensure that state tax dollars will not be used to advance discrimination against students.

Private and religious schools that participate in Pennsylvania's OSTC program have publicly-posted policies and procedures that demonstrate they engage in blatant and explicit discrimination against students because of their LGBTQ+ status, religion, academics, disability, pregnancy or abortion, and more.

School vouchers do not create educational "choice" for many families and students. Instead, voucher programs create the illusion of "choice" because private and religious voucher schools can— and do— engage in discrimination and refuse to enroll students, even if their family is eligible for a voucher.

Allocating state tax dollars to fund private and religious voucher schools does not help the state to meet its constitutional requirements.

Instead, directing public dollars into voucher schools that are free to discriminate against children makes compliance with the court ruling harder to achieve. Every public dollar that funds tuition at a private school leaves fewer dollars available to be spent in the state budget, undermining the Commonwealth's ability to fully fund public schools in every community.

We most strongly urge you to oppose any additional funding for unaccountable EITC and OSTC programs and any other school voucher program in the 2024-2025 state budget and to instead support robust investments in public schools, which 90% of students attend, that will bring the commonwealth closer to meeting its constitutional responsibility.

Pennsylvania students will be in the best position to succeed in their lives when our public schools across the commonwealth are fully funded and able to offer all students opportunities that will prepare them for a bright future after graduation.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this important issue.

412 Justice	Angel Gober	Executive Director
AAUW PA	Cindy Hall	President
Action Together NEPA	Kristin Volchansky	Advocacy Director
Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools	Moira Kaleida	National Director
Cumberland Valley Rising	Katie Daniels	Chair
Disability Rights Pennsylvania	Peri Jude Radecic	Chief Executive Officer
Education Voters of PA	Susan Spicka	Executive Director
League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania	Amy Widestrom	Executive Director
Make The Road Pennsylvania	Patty Torres Vera	Co-Deputy State Director
Pennsylvanians for Fair Funding	Laura Johnson	Co-Founder
Pennsylvania Policy Center	Marc Stier	Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Pennsylvania Advocates	Signe Espinoza	Executive Director
POWER Interfaith, Education Justice Campaign	John Barnett	Lay Leader, Education Justice Campaign
Public Education Advocates of Lancaster	Adam Hosey	Co-founder
Red Wine & Blue	Ronna Dewey	Pennsylvania Program Director
Teach Plus PA	Laura Boyce	Executive Director
The Arc of Pennsylvania	Sherri Landis	Executive Director
Unitarian Universalist Justice PA	Rev. Joan M. Sabatino	Director