January 22, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
568 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The 42 undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) write to express our strong opposition to private school vouchers. We believe that public money should fund public education, and we urge you to oppose any legislation that would funnel public money to private schools through private school vouchers.

Although promoted as “school choice,” private school vouchers do not provide real choice to students and parents. The “choice” in voucher programs actually lies with the private schools, which may turn students away for a variety of reasons often including disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, academic achievement, and economic status.

In contrast, public schools are open to all. Public schools educate nearly 90% of our country’s students and are a cornerstone of our communities. Private school voucher programs undermine our nation’s public schools by diverting desperately needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of a few, select students in private, often religious, schools.

Private school vouchers fail to improve students’ academic achievement. Indeed, they often cause students to perform worse than their peers who aren’t in the voucher program: recent studies of the Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio, and Washington, DC, programs show that voucher students experienced significant declines in their academic performance.¹ The impact of accepting a voucher on academic achievement in these

programs is on par with or worse than the learning loss caused by Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 pandemic.²

Private school voucher programs have a sordid history. The origins of school vouchers, unfortunately, can be traced back to the Civil Rights era, at the peak of efforts to desegregate schools after Brown v. Board of Education.³ The initial use of public K-12 vouchers to attend private schools was meant for white families to escape state desegregation efforts. While contemporary supporters of school vouchers do not necessarily espouse segregationist intent, vouchers still fund discrimination today. Despite receiving public funds, voucher schools do not abide by the same federal civil rights mandates that public schools must meet, including those in Title VI and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Students who attend private schools with vouchers are also stripped of additional protections for their civil rights and liberties, including First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights.

Students with disabilities are especially underserved by vouchers. Voucher schools do not provide the same quantity and quality of services available to students with disabilities in public schools, including those mandated under each student’s individualized education program (IEP). Voucher schools often deny students with disabilities admission or subject them to inappropriate or excessive suspensions or expulsions. This discrimination should not be paid for with taxpayer funds.

In addition, voucher programs often lack even the most basic accountability standards and oversight requirements to ensure that taxpayer money is not being wasted. They frequently do not require participating schools to meet any baseline standard for teacher qualification, student testing, financial accountability, or even safe facilities. There is a long list of instances where this lack of oversight has resulted in waste, fraud, and abuse.

Vouchers are bad public policy. Congress would better serve our children by using our limited taxpayer funds to ensure every child has access to a strong public education. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Atheists
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

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² Voucher Impacts on Student Outcomes As Harmful As Natural Disasters (Measured in Standard Deviation), National Coalition for Public Education (2023).
³ Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied (June 2018).
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
The Arc of the United States
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC)
Center for Inquiry (CFI)
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of the Great City Schools
Feminist Majority Foundation
First Focus Campaign for Children
Freedom From Religion Foundation
GLSEN
In the Public Interest
Interfaith Alliance
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of School Psychologists
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Collaborative
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
Network for Public Education
People For the American Way
Public Funds Public Schools
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
The Secular Coalition for America
School Social Work Association of America
Southern Education Foundation
SPLC Action Fund
Women of Reform Judaism

cc:
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Senators