

January 22, 2024

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

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

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

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

RE: Oppose Private School Vouchers

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, and Senators Schumer and McConnell,

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.<sup>1</sup> The impact of accepting a voucher on academic achievement in these

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<sup>1</sup> R. Joseph Waddington & Mark Berends, [Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement Effects for Students in Upper Elementary & Middle School](#), 37 *J. of Policy Analysis & Mgmt.* 4, 738-808 (Aug. 2018); Atila Abdulkadiroğlu, Parag A. Pathak & Christopher R. Walters, [Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement?](#), 10 *Am. Econ. Journal: Applied Econ.* 1, 175-206 (Jan. 2018); David Figlio & Krzysztof Karbownik, [Evaluation of Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, & Performance Effects](#), *Fordham Inst.*

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

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*.<sup>3</sup> 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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(July 2016); U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied](#) (June 2018).

<sup>2</sup> [Voucher Impacts on Student Outcomes As Harmful As Natural Disasters \(Measured in Standard Deviation\)](#), National Coalition for Public Education (2023).

<sup>3</sup> See Jon Hale, *The Choice We Face: How Segregation, Race, & Power Have Shaped America's Most Controversial Education Reform Movement*, Beacon Press (2021); Steve Suits, *Overturing Brown: The Segregationist Legacy of the Modern School Choice Movement*, NewSouth Books (2020).

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