



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
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League of Women Voters Pennsylvania
Letter to PA Senators
April 11, 2011

Dear Senator,

The League of Women Voters strongly supports fair, equitable, and excellent education for ALL students in Pennsylvania. Senate Bill 1, though well-intentioned, is misguided. It would drain money from public schools to send a few children to private and parochial schools.

At a time when the governor is proposing a budget that would take \$1 billion from public schools in the coming year, we cannot afford to add this costly program to cuts that schools are already facing. Given even moderate projections of numbers of students using vouchers, this program could cost the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars by the third year.

Even if the proposed voucher program were affordable, there is no evidence that children who attend private and parochial schools achieve at a higher level than those in the public schools. For example, in Milwaukee, students who received vouchers to attend private or religious schools performed worse on statewide reading and math tests than their public school counterparts. Likewise, in Ohio voucher students in private and parochial schools did no better than, and sometimes worse than, their counterparts in public schools.

Under Senate Bill 1, private and parochial schools would not be accountable for their students' academic growth or for their use of taxpayer dollars. Unlike public schools, private schools are not required to reach state standards, administer and report results of state achievement tests, or meet Adequate Yearly Progress. They do not have to make their budgets public or make their expenditures known. This lack of fiscal and educational accountability may result in scarce educational dollars being wasted.

Private and parochial schools maintain the right not to admit students for whom they do not have "an appropriate program." So the "choice" is really the schools' choice. This may well result in the private schools admitting the students who are easier and less expensive to educate, leaving the children who need additional support in the public schools with fewer resources available.

Recent polls show that approximately two-thirds of Pennsylvanians do not approve of public taxpayers' money being used to provide tuition scholarships for private and parochial schools. Instead, they support tutoring programs, smaller class size, qualified teachers, and greater parental involvement as ways to improve academic achievement.

The League of Women Voters urges you to vote against Senate Bill 1. At this time, we cannot afford an expensive program with no accountability and no proven results. Instead, we urge the legislature to explore ways to make ALL schools successful for ALL students.

Sincerely,

Olivia Thorne, President, League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania