



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
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**Testimony for Senate Education Committee**

**League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania**

**Olivia Thorne, President**

Thank you for accepting the League of Women Voters' testimony concerning SB 1. A grassroots organization, committed to good government, the League of Women Voters studies issues carefully before reaching consensus. Thus, the League's positions reflect deliberation and discussion of different viewpoints, as well as pros and cons of issues related to good government.

The League of Women Voters strongly supports equal access to quality public education, but we are firmly opposed to using taxpayer funded tuition vouchers for non-public schools. SB 1 would not help solve the unacceptable problem of disparities in resources between rich and poor districts – a major reason that some schools are consistently identified as “low performing.” SB 1 would divert financial resources from the public schools which are already threatened with lower state subsidies. Taking resources away from schools that are already struggling will do nothing to help the children who attend these schools, many of whom will not be eligible for tuition vouchers or will not be accepted by the nonpublic schools.

Nonpublic schools would not be required to accept students with tuition vouchers if the schools did not “offer appropriate programs or is not structured or equipped with the necessary facilities to meet the special needs of the opportunity scholarship recipient.” Thus, students with special needs would be less likely to be admitted. Neither would nonresident public schools be required to admit students with vouchers. So “school choice” would be much better characterized as schools having the choice, not the parents.

In Pennsylvania, parents already have choices in their children's education. Parents may send their children to charter schools; they may home school them, send them to magnet schools, or send them to their local public schools. The nonpublic schools that would benefit from tuition vouchers are the parochial schools and the for-profit and other private schools.

In the current SB 1, there is no accountability for either childrens' achievement or for financial management for nonpublic schools. Unlike the public schools which administer state tests and report all results, nonpublic schools are not required to give these tests or report any achievement results. Additionally, they do not have to meet the standards that the state has set for each academic area.

Unlike the public schools, where the budgets are a matter of public record, nonpublic schools are not required to make their financial records public. So, even though these schools would be receiving taxpayer money in the form of tuition vouchers, there would be no way for the public to know whether the children were achieving or how the tuition money was being spent.

In today's tight budget climate, it seems imprudent to embark upon another program which will require more money from both state and local districts. It would require that districts provide transportation for all tuition voucher students who attend schools within a ten-mile radius of the school district. It also establishes additional bureaucracy in the form of an Executive Director and staff necessary to support the program. Additionally, in the third year of the proposed legislation, these tuition vouchers would be available to ALL students of low-income families, regardless of whether they were enrolled in low-achieving schools or not. This would put additional constraints on the moneys that the state has to provide for a fair and equitable public school system.

The League believes all children should receive an adequate education in successful, achieving schools. We support adequate state funding and a system that distributes these funds in a manner that diminishes the dependence of school districts on the resources of local taxpayers. We urge the educational community to put resources, best practices in education, and energy into making ALL schools places where children can achieve. Tuition vouchers will do nothing to improve the performance of low achieving schools.