April 18, 2023
The Honorable Aaron Bean
Chair
Early Childhood, Elementary, & Secondary Education Subcommittee
Committee on Education & the Workforce
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici
Ranking Member
Early Childhood, Elementary, & Secondary Education Subcommittee
Committee on Education & the Workforce
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Hearing on "School Choice: Expanding Educational Freedom for All"

Dear Chairman Bean and Ranking Member Bonamici:

The 34 undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) submit this letter for the April 18, 2023 hearing on "School Choice: Expanding Education Freedom for All" 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 create or expand private school voucher programs.

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. Rooted in attempts to evade desegregation orders in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education,³ they still fund discrimination today. Despite receiving public funds, voucher schools do not abide by the same civil rights laws as public schools, 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 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.

For all of the above reasons, we urge you to reject any private school voucher proposals discussed at this hearing or in the future. In particular, we urge you to oppose the continuation of the federally funded Washington, DC voucher program. And we urge you to oppose any of the other voucher or voucher-like schemes that have been proposed and failed to pass in recent years, including: measures to convert Title I funding for low-income students into a nationwide voucher program, plans to strip COVID-19 recovery funding from public schools and funnel it to private schools, and attempts to divert critical Impact Aid funding to create private school voucher programs for military-connected students as part of National Defense Authorization Act.

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

² Voucher Impacts on Student Outcomes As Harmful As Natural Disasters (Measured in Standard Deviation), National Coalition for Public Education (2023).
Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
African American Ministers In Action
American Atheists
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
The Arc of the United States
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
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 Rural Education Advocacy Collaborative
National Rural Education Association
Network for Public Education
Public Funds Public Schools
The Secular Coalition for America
SPLC Action Fund
Union for Reform Judaism