

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

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. Rooted in attempts to evade desegregation orders in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*,<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<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).

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