

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, November 26, 2024 5:30 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: ESTF

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee Members:

Please reinstate the **Education Scholarship Trust Fund**. It is very important for the future of our children, and I would like to contribute to it.

Tom Dorsel
Hilton Head, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, November 26, 2024 5:03 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: Michael Acquilano
Subject: Education Bill Hearing in December

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

[REDACTED]

Dear Senators of the great State of South Carolina:

I write in defense of reinstating the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) that the State Supreme Court ruled could not continue.

Our state and nation both agree that children have the right to an education. While there have been times and places within our state when and where the state has provided excellent education, it is not always the case. There is a derogatory phrase "Corridor of Shame" for a reason. This is documented in a website: South Carolina's Corridor of Shame. As the website states: "The Corridor of Shame, although unofficially defined, consists of roughly (17) counties: Bamberg, Beaufort, Calhoun, Clarendon, Colleton, Darlington, Dillon, Dorchester, Florence, Hampton, Jasper, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Orangeburg, Sumter, and Williamsburg county (The Charleston Chronicle, 2016). do not receive the same funding as other counties for various reasons."

It has also been documents that Catholic schools have also been able to provide excellent resources with lower resources, with students obtaining high scores in their testing. According to the website Catholic schools dominate national test average scores - South Carolina Catholic Conference - SC, "if Catholic schools were a state, they would be the highest performing in the nation on all four tests of the National Center for Education Statistics."

Further, it is very well known that our state continues to witness immigration from other parts of our country and our public schools cannot keep up. During her term, Gov. Nikki Haley approached Bishop Robert Guglielmone to ask for assistance in kindergarten, but she could not guarantee the funds needed to accommodate.

Thus, it sufficiently concludes that the State of South Carolina not only needs assistance to provide the education that our children have the right to its access, but the State has a responsibility to ensure that this education is provided however and through whatever resources are available, ensuring the funding for the families and institutions involved.

Catholic schools are also known on average to provide not only a good education but formation in faith and the overall person. Yes, there are times when Catholic schools could do a better job, but this lies in its funding which this legislation could and should provide.

I ask you to find a way to ensure that this legislation is enacted and implemented as soon as possible for the sake of children, families, and even the school system of our entire state.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED] Thank you and may God bless you all in your ministry to all of us in the Palmetto State! +

Take care and God bless you! +

Rev. John M. Zimmerman
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church

[REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, December 2, 2024 2:14 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) Restoration Support Letter

[REDACTED]

Dear Members of the Senate Education Subcommittee,

I am writing on behalf of Prince of Peace Catholic School, a small yet thriving educational community in Taylors, South Carolina. Our school serves students from diverse backgrounds, united by a shared commitment to academic excellence, spiritual growth, and service to others.

This year, seven of our students were able to attend Prince of Peace Catholic School due to the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF). These students represent more than just numbers in our enrollment—they have become an integral part of our school family. The court ruling in September, which suspended the program, created an immediate and devastating challenge for these families and our school.

The growth we have seen in these students is remarkable. Academically, they have excelled in a rigorous curriculum that prepares them not only for success in higher education but also for their broader roles in society. Socially, they have embraced the values of kindness, and responsibility that are central to our school's mission. Further, they have enriched our classrooms and extracurricular programs with their unique perspectives and talents.

Without the support of the ESTF, these families were left scrambling to find alternative ways to fund their children's education. For many, it meant facing the difficult decision of whether they could afford to continue providing the education they had carefully chosen. As a school, we have made a firm commitment to ensure that these students remain with us this academic year, but this is not a sustainable solution long-term.

The restoration of the ESTF would provide immediate relief to these families and countless others across the state. It would ensure that school choice is not just a principle but a reality for all South Carolina families. Our state is stronger when parents have the freedom to choose the educational environment that best suits their children's needs, and programs like the ESTF make that possible for everyone, regardless of income or circumstance.

I urge you to prioritize the reinstatement of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund. The students whose lives have already been transformed by this program—and those who stand to benefit in the future—are counting on your leadership and support.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to ensuring educational opportunities for all South Carolina families.

Principal Nathan Barontini
Prince of Peace Catholic School

[REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, December 2, 2024 12:15 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Written testimony K-12 Education Scholarships 12-10-2024
Attachments: SchoolChoiceSenSub121024.pages

[REDACTED]

Attached and below are copies of written testimony to be presented to the subcommittee members meeting on December 10, 2024. Thank you for your consideration.

[REDACTED]

December 2, 2024

Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships
402 Gressette Building
P.O. Box 142
Columbia, SC 29202
seducomm@scsenate.gov

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

December 10, 2024 Room 308 re: K-12 Education Scholarships

As an older citizen and taxpayer in South Carolina, I oppose continuing this endeavor to provide "school choice" options under government law and at the expense of all the citizens of this state. Particularly for those of us on a fixed income, this additional financial and tax burden is unacceptable. There appear to be numerous arguments about the supposed minimal or non-existent financial impact on the public, as well as the weaponization of "compassion" that is used to justify trying to help those supposedly in need. In actuality defenses of this effort are presented from an inaccurate view of both the financial dangers and the real goals of "school choice" legislation.

Legislation of this nature is really a clever way to continue the efforts of those who promote state control of education by enticing people to support government-run programs. Such laws will eventually and surely remove any vestige of educational freedom and true choice. I suggest reviewing the many pertinent articles published on the ConservaTruth.com website for a better understanding.

One of the most concerning aspects of these schemes is that they all continue widespread policies that foster redistribution of wealth. There have been long-term indoctrination and acceptance of a plethora of redistribution of wealth programs in this state and country under many categories, but acceptance of them does not make these programs good. Redistribution often comes, as in the case of older taxpayers on fixed incomes, with the reality of taking from those in need in order to give it to others deemed more deserving. It behooves each of you to acquire a better understanding of "school choice," who will be paying the price, and what the consequences will be.

My comments are based on considerable background, having first been recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in education in the 1970s. As early as the 70s, ideas such as vouchers and other schemes to make it easier for more people to afford alternative educational choices and avoid public schools were being debated. However, the dangers to freedom and the inevitability of increasing government strings and controls prevented such ideas from going very far. It is interesting to see that there is now a resurgence of these schemes.

Thank you for taking on this investigation. Should there be any opportunity for the public to meet with or present testimony before this committee or any interested members, please notify me. I would be glad to present some clarifying perspectives and information.

I will be following this legislation closely. Please do not pursue these dangerous schemes any further. We have enough law in this state, especially about education. Legislators should be streamlining our statutes, protecting educational freedom, and allowing parents to take responsibility for and maintain their right to choose their children's upbringing and educational environment. Please go no farther with this issue and do no more damage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Margaret A. Johnson

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 12:24 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Comments for Dec. 10 Senate Education Subcommittee Meeting on K-12 Education Scholarships

[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Committee Members,

I am writing to ask you to put an end to the expansion of the K-12 Education Scholarship Account program. As a Charlestonian who sent my children to Catholic schools, I fully support parents' choice in education. However, it has been proven that vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools. Although these programs were originally promoted as options to help students from poverty, experience in other states has shown that the majority of parents who have benefited from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar programs have not been families from poverty, but rather families who were already sending their students to private schools.

I do not understand how our legislature can legally disperse taxpayer provided funds to private schools or home school programs that do not have public accountability. You as lawmakers are accountable for responsible use of public money, and any private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools. These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.

Thank you,
Jennifer Metts

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 12:25 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School funding

[REDACTED]

I have always supported public schools. South Carolina has been derelict for years by not providing public education that meets the needs of all students. My son is 50 now, and works as an engineer. South Carolina public schools completely failed him. In 3rd grade, I pulled him out of public school and sent him to a school for children with learning disabilities. This should not have been necessary. It created a burden on our family.

I do not think vouchers or funding private schools is the answer. Low income families could not afford special schools, even with vouchers. Transportation to school would also be an issue.

As a native born South Carolinian, I beg you to improve our schools. It is time SC public education to be near the top in the nation not the bottom. We can only do this by properly funding and supporting our public schools, teaching children critical thinking, and creating situations where everyone can learn and flourish.

Carole H. Gunter

Sent from my iPad
Carole Gunter

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 11:36 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Oppose vouchers

[REDACTED]

Dear committee members,

I am writing to oppose the use of any public funds for private or religious schools. I do not want my tax dollars paying for children to attend non-public schools. Public schools are one of the greatest achievements of our country, and they deserve more funding -- not less. Public schools are required to take all children, even ones like mine with a learning disability, and teach them. They will not benefit when funds are diverted to the few families who can drive to and afford private schools.

Additionally, states that have enacted vouchers (or what you call scholarships) are seeing dramatic hits to their budgets. South Carolina does not need to lose money supporting private schools.

Instead, please invest in our public school teachers, our public school staff, and our public school buildings.

Thank you,
Claiborne Linvill

Pickens County Council
ther of two students in Clemson, SC
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 11:24 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: State Money for State Schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Sir or Madam,

I vigorously oppose spending state funds on private and church-sponsored schools. For one thing, public schools are the bulwark of our democracy. For another, every child in our state deserves a quality public/free education. Finally, it is against the Constitution of our fine state to use public funds for private schools.

The third point should be enough.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my ideas.

Amy Mikell

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 11:17 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Education Scholarships

[REDACTED]

To all the Members of the Senate Education Subcommittee:

I am sending this email to you as I am NOT in favor of diverting public funds to support private education. Both of my adult sons are products of the public school system. They both received a very good education at T.L. Hanna High School in Anderson, SC. Approximately 90% of South Carolina parents prefer to send their children to public schools. Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent the most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools. These vouchers and scholarships are not accessible to families in rural areas as those areas do not have access to private schools. The use of public funds to support private schools diverts needed funds from the public schools. If funds are disbursed to private schools, they should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools. These standards include financial transparency and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are used in the public schools. Private schools do not have to be inclusive. They do not have to accept all students. This allows them to have policies that can be discriminatory. Public funds should not pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups including racial or ethnic minorities. Finally, offering "universal choice" risks serious budgetary consequences. This will seriously undermine public education. Please realize that the citizens of South Carolina are a diverse population. Public education is there for all children regardless of race, religion, or disabilities. Please do not move this bill forward in the next general session. Thank you for your time. Andrea Draisen, M. D.



SOUTH CAROLINA
**CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

Dec. 3, 2024

South Carolina Senate Education Committee,
PO Box 142
402 Gressette Building
Columbia, SC 29202

Dear Chairman Hembree,

On behalf of the Catholic faithful of South Carolina, we reaffirm our support for the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program that was signed into law in 2023. This bill was passed with the intention of extending school choice to South Carolina's families who are most in need. We continue our unwavering support to provide all children with an education that allows them to flourish.

With the launching of the ESTF program this year, nearly 200 children in our state were given access to a quality Catholic education. Twenty-two Catholic schools were able to open their doors to program recipients, and the success stories shared with us are genuinely heartwarming. Many families expressed that their children were happier than they had ever seen them in their new school, even within a matter of weeks. We believe education is central to the human person and is more than reading, writing and arithmetic. True education involves forming and nurturing the entire person — mind, body and spirit.

A few weeks into the academic year, the state Supreme Court ruled that these scholarships could no longer be used for nonpublic schools. Hundreds of families, students and schools around our state were left with nowhere to turn. Most Rev. Jacques Fabre-Jeune, Bishop of the Diocese of Charleston, assured families that our Catholic schools would not turn away students. The diocese quickly began fundraising efforts to offer relief to these children and their parents.

However, many other independent schools and families were not so lucky, and it was thanks to the generosity of donors that all ESTF recipients were covered for non-public school tuition through the end of December. With the new year approaching, parents are forced to choose yet again whether they must pull their children from their new schools in the middle of the academic year.

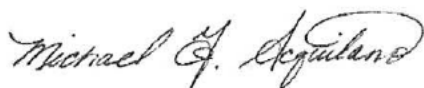
Since it was founded over 2,000 years ago, the Catholic Church has poured itself out for the education and formation of children and youth, especially children no one else would educate, such as those living in poverty or immigrants. In the Catholic faith, we honor the lives of saints — people who are in Heaven because they lived the Gospel in their earthly lives. St. John Bosco was a champion of youth and education who gave his life and everything he had to the education of poor children. He said that if we want to have a good society, "we must concentrate all our forces on the Christian education of the young. Experience has taught me that if we wish to sustain civil society then we should take good care of the young."

Education is the key to a brighter future. By extending knowledge, wisdom, kindness and generosity to our children, we can hope that God's will is done on earth as it is in Heaven.

I implore you to act swiftly to remedy this crisis, to bring peace of mind to these families, and to extend the freedom of academic choice to more students around our state. When children have the ability to learn according to their unique needs, we can hope for great fruits to come forth.

I thank you for your time and for your consideration.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michael F. Aquilano". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Michael F. Aquilano, JD
Chief Operating Officer & Vice Chancellor, Catholic Diocese of Charleston
Director, South Carolina Catholic Conference

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:55 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers

[REDACTED]

NO, NO, NO to vouchers! Public money should be used ONLY to support public education---not for schools that can select their students. It's unfair to compare public and private schools because of this fact alone. Then add in the issues of transportation, lack of special services, and the very mixed impacts on test scores in private schools. NO. These schools are not better for most of the population!

Keep the wall between church and state high; that's what has kept our democracy strong.
Dr. Patricia Mohr

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:50 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Oppose Use of Public Money for Private Schools

[REDACTED]

To Senate Committee Members,

I am very concerned that our American belief and practice of separation of church and state will be violated if South Carolina uses public money to fund private and/or religious schools. Public schools which welcome all students is the heart of our educational system.

The vast majority of parents in S.C. prefer that public money be used only for public schools and I therefore strongly urge you to support your electors' wishes and not divert any public funds from our public schools.

Sincerely,
Sigrid Carlson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:49 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Education

[REDACTED]

Voters support public schools

About 90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools. When private school funding options have been on the ballot in other states, voters have rejected the idea of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools.

Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools.

Although these "choice" programs were originally promoted as options to help students from poverty, experience in other states has shown that the majority of parents who have benefited from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar programs have not been families from poverty, but rather families who were already sending their students to private schools.

Private schools are not accessible to most students in rural and low-income communities.

Educational Scholarship programs and vouchers are not accessible to most families in rural and low-income communities because few private schools serve rural communities and because the funds that have been offered for private school expenses are not sufficient to cover tuition plus other requisite expenses, such as transportation and meals.

Disbursing public funds requires public accountability.

Lawmakers are accountable for the responsible use of public money, and any private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools. These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.

Private schools can discriminate against minorities.

Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.

Offering "universal choice" risks serious budgetary consequences.

A variety of dark-money groups that promote the privatization of K-12 education for profit seek to weaken and undermine public education. When other states have offered private school options to all parents, the impact on state budget funding has been substantial.

in a nutshell, stop using my tax dollars for private schools. Educate the public not the wealthy.

Charleen Smith

--

Charleen Selph Smith

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:29 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public money for public schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Education Committee,

South Carolina's elected state government has been weighing whether to direct public funds to private and/or religious schools. This is an idea I vehemently oppose! As a parent I have experienced both public and private schools and there is no question in my mind that it is the *public* schools that need more funding. In South Carolina they are woefully underfunded. I have lived in numerous states and none of the others neglect their public schools as much as South Carolina does. Rural schools especially need more funding. Private schools are not located in rural areas. Vouchers for private or religious schools would be just a fraction of the costs poor families would not be able to cover to send their children to a private school. Furthermore, private and religious schools do not have to admit children with disabilities and do not have to submit their student scores on state tests.

South Carolina gives industries and corporations generous tax breaks to entice them to our state and in doing so robs the public schools. This is both physically observable and is proven by the rock bottom ratings of our schools nationally.

Again I know from experience that private and religious schools can *and do* raise funds on their own. They can issue their own scholarships for needy students. I want my tax dollars to go to public schools!

Very sincerely,
M Christine Shaffer, citizen and voter in Mount Pleasant

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:22 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Taxpayer Funds for Private / Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

Greetings,
Hard NO on any taxpayer funds going to ANY religious or private schools. NO. Unconstitutional, illegal, immoral, wrong.

NO.

Refresher- it's clearly spelled out for you in our Constitution.

Sincerely,
Citizen and taxpayer
Lisa Bowes

SECTION 3. System of free public schools and other public institutions of learning.

The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a system of free public schools open to all children in the State and shall establish, organize and support such other public institutions of learning, as may be desirable.

SECTION 4. Direct aid to religious or other private educational institutions prohibited.

No money shall be paid from public funds nor shall the credit of the State or any of its political subdivisions be used for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:04 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do NOT divert public funds

[REDACTED]

Please note - I am speaking out AGAINST diverting public funds for private or religious schools.

Do NOT divert our public school funds.

Thank you,

Leslie Fried
A concerned citizen in Beaufort, SC

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 9:48 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Re: Diverting public funds to support private or religious schools

[REDACTED]

Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.



Susan Levin

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 9:26 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public funds to religious or private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Education Committee,

I am a product of public schools and taught in our SC public schools for 35 years. Public schools have been the means to secure a well-educated public; offering educational opportunities to all children. Diverting funds from public education weakens that system.

- Private and religious schools are not held to the accountability standards that public schools must adhere to.
- Private and religious schools may have their own requirements for admission. Some of those requirements may discriminate against children of different ethnicities or religions, children with developmental or physical impairments requiring specialized programs or accommodations, or LGBTQ+ students. Public funds should not support discrimination.
- 90% of adults favor public education; their children attend our public schools.
- Private or religious schools serve families that are already in a position to pay for private schooling.
- Private schools are not readily available to children in rural or poverty areas.
- Offering "universal choice" has serious budgetary implications. When other states have offered private school options to all parents, the impact on state budget funding has been substantial.

In other words, funding private/religious schools weakens public education which is commissioned to serve all of our young citizens.

Please continue to support public education!

Sincerely,

Joyce Harrison

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 9:22 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 scholarships

[REDACTED]

I understand a meeting is called for December 10 to discuss using public funds to support private or religious schools. I am opposed to this plan as I think it is a threat to public education. This leaches away funds needed to go to the schools that are available to all of our citizens and that is not fair at all in my opinion. I say this even knowing that my own grandchildren have attended private schools but our family was able to pay that tuition as we should have since it was our choice to send them there. Our democracy is only strong when our people have an adequate education and can vote with knowledge of the issues. We are undercutting our strength when we don't support strong public schools! Please don't endorse this unfair plan!!

Nancy Jones Bradley

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 9:18 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Education funding

[REDACTED]

Please oppose any efforts to divert tax dollars for public schools to private schools. Public schools assure basic education for ALL children. Private schools pick and choose who can attend and are not bound by equal opportunity principles nor by meeting standards of education adopted by the state. In addition, the dollars designated as vouchers to assist poorer families do not cover enough of the costs to make it possible for their children to actually attend, even if they are accepted.

So the net effects of vouchers are to give money to parents who are already exercising their right to choose by sending their children to private schools. They certainly have that right, but we taxpayers have no obligation to pay for their preference.

If parents of special needs children are having problems getting what their children need in public schools, please focus your efforts and funding to strengthen what is available in public education rather than draining away what is already inadequate funding.

Please keep public dollars funding public education!

Lill Mood

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 9:07 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: please support public school education

[REDACTED]

Hi,
As a parent of two kids who went to public school K-12 and then to Clemson graduates, I believe in the importance of all kids having access to a good education. Limiting funds to public schools by redirecting those funds to private schools hinders those children who already don't have the same opportunities.

It has been shown in other states that using vouchers for private schools from taxpayer funds goes mainly to children who are already in private schools. Lower income kids don't typically have access to private schools as few private schools are located in rural communities and the funds offered for these schools do not include needed items such as transportation to those schools.

Public education was designed to serve all children and we need to be sure we are providing the best opportunities for all children the opportunity to develop into adults who are successful.

Thank you for your consideration.

--
Kind Regards,
Valerie



Valerie Wetzel

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:44 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public funds to support private or religious schools is a threat to South Carolina public education

[REDACTED]

Dear Senators:

Private schools can be dangerous to civic participation for many reasons but particularly so in South Carolina because there is less oversight on what is being learned. America today needs well educated citizens, not drones who follow whatever their teacher tells them.

Moreover, private schools across the country are often segregated. This is not consistent with the US constitution.

I am embarrassed by the stupidity of many of my acquaintances who went to SC schools. Many adults today in my local Greenville County community need a course on Theory of Knowledge to fight misinformation and trash on the internet.

America needs and deserves better education not watered down curriculum to solve futures coming our way, including AI, corruption, and threats from abroad.

I earned both an MA and a MBA degree. I have taught college level classes for five years. I stand with educators who believe that public education serves all of us better than private schools. Keep public funding in public schools.

Thank you for reading this. LWV brought this to my attention.

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:10 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Reject public funding for private schools

[REDACTED]

Given our position as 2nd lowest state in the country in terms of achievement, we need to support our public schools not destroy them. We have new companies moving to South Carolina but lack the educated workforce to staff them.

Martha Beck

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 7:48 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers

[REDACTED]

Besides the issue of separation of church and state there is the issue of subsidizing private citizens who can already afford private schools. Spend that money on teacher pay so South Carolina attracts the brightest and best teachers for our children and to upgrade our schools and facilities. Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,
Ann Fuhr
Clemson SC

[REDACTED]

sent: Monday, December 2, 2024 6:57 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Re: School Funding and Vouchers

[REDACTED]

As a voting constituent I am requesting that you do NOT use taxpayer \$\$\$ from public schools to fund private schools.

Letty Grayson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:28 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do not divert money from public education

[REDACTED]

Molly Fitzpatrick

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 2:55 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public education

[REDACTED]

Please do not allow funds from taxpayers to be diverted from public schools to private schools for any reason.

South Carolinians wanting private education for their children must be required to use private money. Our public schools require excellent funding in order to produce excellent students. The future of democracy depends on that.

Fran Heyward Bollin

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 3:01 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Save our Public Schools

[REDACTED]

I believe that our public school system is the backbone of what makes our country great. It affords all of us equal opportunities. If the funding for these schools gets diluted by allowing private and parochial schools to share in this funding, it could mean the demise of our public school system. These schools are not held to the same high standards we hold for our public schools, both academically (standardized tests) and morally (blocking some students from attending their institutions).

As a retired teacher and a product of our public school system (as well as my daughters and grandchildren), I strongly encourage you to keep public funding where it belongs: funding ONLY public schools.

Lois J. Turner

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 3:31 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Education Problem

[REDACTED]

Dear members of the Senate education, subcommittee,

As a former public school teacher and administrator in South Carolina schools, I am very concerned about diverting public education, money to private schools.

Most parents, 90%, in SC are relatively happy with the public school set up and prefer to send their children there. About 10% of the students, who are very wealthy, go to private schools. A recent educational scholarship account has benefited these wealthy students mostly and not the families living in poverty. These private schools do not have to reach the same standards and take the same tests that the public school students do. They can also reject students for any reason whatsoever.

Consider rejecting private school scholarships, and give that money to public schools.

Cheryl Lee

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 3:30 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public funds to support private or religious schools is a threat to South Carolina public education

[REDACTED]

Voters support public schools and as a business owner and employer I support the public school system. I do not have children and STILL I support my tax dollars going to the public school system. Public monies should never go to any school associating with a religion. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.

(Voucher analogy) Taxpayers should pay for my private golf course membership since I don't like the public one. The public one is too crowded & not properly maintained. The private one limits membership to only certain qualified golfers, and their clubhouse is more to my liking. Never mind that I may have already been attending and paying for the private golf course....

Gretchen Lambert AIA, WELL AP
Vice President

STUDIO 2LR | ARCHITECTURE + INTERIORS

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 3:47 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee, Most children in South Carolina, including my grandchildren, attend public schools. Diverting money to private schools will only hurt their education. The situation is bad enough in fairly affluent communities. It is even worse in poor areas, and there are so many in this state. .Please keep our tax dollars where they belong, supporting programs for all students.

Nancy Higgins, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 3:58 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Please reject public funding of private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Senate Education Committee,

Diverting public funds to support private or religious schools is a threat to South Carolina public education.

Voters support public schools. About 90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools. When private school funding options have been on the ballot in other states, voters have rejected the idea of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools.

I oppose sending public money to private or religious schools.

Thank you,
Laura Moses
Charleston

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 4:04 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Funding Public Schools

[REDACTED]

I am against allowing Public Funds to be used for private or religious schools. Please do not let this happen.
Judy Medlin

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 4:46 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Private Education

[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

I strongly oppose sending public money to private or religious schools. As an economist with a Ph. D. from the University of South Carolina (1990), I can assure you that the benefits of state-funded public education are vast. We all reap the benefits of an educated population. Taking money from public schools to support private ones guts the public schools and results in vast inequities in education. These inequities hurt all of us because the overall population becomes less educated.

In addition, as a pastor, I urge you to do what is best for ALL the children of South Carolina. While on paper, it seems that vouchers and scholarship programs help the less fortunate, the reality is that these programs help those who are already sending their children to private or religious schools. By subsidizing--with state funds-- the children already in private or religious schools, the State takes money from the public schools and hurts those who do not have the opportunity to attend private or religious schools because of cost, transportation issues, etc.

I urge you to make the fair, equitable, and economically sound choice of not supporting vouchers or scholarship programs for private or religious schools.

Sincerely,
Alston F. Lippert, Ph.D, M. Div

--
Reverend Alston Flynn Lippert
Associate Pastor for Nurture
Washington Street United Methodist Church
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 5:01 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds are for PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Importance: High

[REDACTED]

Good afternoon,

I strongly oppose the use of any public funds (local, state or federal) for private or religious schools. Our public schools are the place to receive public funds for education.

I am an elder at Shandon Presbyterian Church and support the clear separation of church and state. I urge you to support our public schools by using public education funds ONLY for them and No funds for private or religious schools.

Thank you, Rowena Nylund, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 5:34 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Why I oppose vouchers for private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee members,

I am a voter in Senate District 22. I opposed vouchers for attendance at private schools. This practice dilutes the money available for public education.

Public education is the building block for a better community. Ninety (90%) of our parents send their children to public schools. We should not use taxpayers funds to assist parents that are already sending their children to private schools. We will only be widening the income gap between those who are already privileged and those who struggle everyday because of their lack of advantages (i.e., food security, health care, affordable housing).

Thank you for your service to all South Carolina citizens, of all incomes and situations.

Sincerely,
Linda C. McDonald

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 5:49 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers

[REDACTED]

I am very opposed to vouchers for private schools. This plan takes money away from much needed funds for public schools. As a form of educator, I'm very much in favor of supporting our public schools with funds and other support. Are you sending something to?
Judy Timmons
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:06 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Subcommittee meeting - December 10, 2024

[REDACTED]

To The Senate Education Subcommittee,

I write to you as a resident of Rock Hill in York County, SC and mother of a 5th grade student. I would like to express my full support for Public Education in our State. I would like to speak out against any type of voucher/scholarship program that will divert state funds to private schools.

It has been shown that vouchers used in other states have mostly benefited families who are ALREADY able to afford private education. This hurts and does not help the majority, raising the overall cost of supporting not just public schools, but now adding on students who never would have enrolled in public schools to begin with. I do not want my tax dollars to be diverted in this way.

Vouchers also hurt those who most need the help that public schools now offer; those with disabilities, rural students who rely on bus transportation, and minority groups. These groups, and more, do not have the same protections under private schools that are guaranteed through the public education systems.

Please take the good of everyone into account before making any decisions. I firmly believe that vouchers will only hurt our public education system, the students in it, and state and local budgets.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my thoughts on this.

Sincerely,
Allison Brinkley

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S22+ 5G, an AT&T 5G smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:13 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Against public funding of private schools in SC

[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Education Subcommittee:

Please consider my views for your upcoming meeting on Dec 10. **Public funding should NOT be allowed for private schools in SC.**

MAIN REASONS

Discrimination - private schools can choose their students. That's OK because they're private! But giving them public money means taxpayers would be condoning their ability to *discriminate* against whoever they want: minorities, sexual orientation, religion, or whatever. This is simply wrong!

Lack of Public Accountability - if private schools are given public money, then they should be subject to exactly the same standards and transparency as public schools. This includes academic standards, standardized tests, and financial accountability. No accountability, no public funding!

Sincerely,

Levie D. Smith, III

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:24 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Regarding Public School Funding and December 10th Session on Vouchers

[REDACTED]

Good evening, distinguished SC Senate members.

I am Anna Vordermark of Clover, SC. I was born and raised in York, SC, and am proud to be raising my son in South Carolina.

As a community volunteer at Oakridge Elementary School, where my son is currently in the 5th grade, I am deeply concerned about potential legislation that could shift funding from our local schools into a voucher system, a move that has already negatively impacted the states and locales that have attempted it. Where private/charter schools can pick their students, our public schools serve every student, regardless of disability or socio-economic status. Failure to protect and educate these less-advantaged children with appropriately funded public schools creates a future problem for safety net programs and, unfortunately, prisons.

You have the chance to protect and preserve an education system that serves all South Carolina children—not just those selected for private, voucher-fed facilities. If you must consider vouchers, please provide guardrails like income caps or policies to extend access to underserved areas and families. So many families in SC already have difficulty accessing our existing system. Vouchers threaten to widen the divide between the haves and the have-nots, rather than giving every child in SC an equal chance to learn and earn here.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter. I appreciate your service to our great state.

Best regards,
Anna Vordermark

[REDACTED]
Parent, Taxpayer, Volunteer

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:27 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 Education Scholarships

[REDACTED]

Good afternoon, SC Senate Ed. Committee:

My name is Cynthia Slafka and I live in Fort Mill. I'm a parent of three children in the public school system, and I previously worked as a pediatric physical therapist in the early intervention and school systems. I'm concerned about possible voucher legislation (which the Senate is choosing to call "Education Scholarships").

As a former professional in the early intervention system, I'm concerned about the fact that private schools have no obligation to accept students with disabilities, nor to follow their IEPs if they do accept such students. Only 1.5 to 3% of kids receiving vouchers in other states are students with disabilities. We have also seen a divide between races and socio-economic status, abled and disabled. Voucher programs don't provide transportation to private schools, so parents without access to transportation can't take advantage of vouchers. And in other states, the majority of families who take advantage of vouchers are families whose students are already in the private school system - not moving there from public schools. So, our tax system will be further burdened to provide these vouchers since there's no money to "follow" these students from public to private school.

If vouchers are to be proposed, please also ensure access for all, including students with disabilities. Please include strict income caps so that these vouchers truly help those who are most underserved. Your constituents are trusting you to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few.

Thank you for all of your work in our state.

Cynthia Slafka

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:31 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Voucher

[REDACTED]

SC Senate,

My name is Jennifer Hirst and I live in Fort Mill SC. I am a parent/teacher/community member, and I have concerns about the possible voucher legislation. I think it is vital that we protect funding for our local schools that serve every student. I'm most concerned about access for students from disadvantaged homes, as well as students with disabilities. Private schools can choose who to educate. Only 1.5 to 3% of kids receiving vouchers in other states are students with disabilities. We have also seen a divide between races and socio-economic status, abled and disabled.

If vouchers are to be proposed, please consider income caps to ensure that the reach and access extends to students who may have limited access due to undeserved areas and lack of resources. Please also ensure access for all, including students with disabilities.

Our constituents are trusting you to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few.

Thank you for all your work in our state.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Hirst
Instructional Assistant

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:48 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School Vouchers

[REDACTED]

Penny Sheppard
[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Education Committee/SubCommittee,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the consideration of school choice vouchers as a policy initiative. While the goal of improving educational outcomes for all students is commendable, school choice vouchers risk exacerbating existing inequalities, particularly for marginalized students, and could have long-term detrimental effects on public education.

1. **Diverting Resources from Public Schools** Public schools serve as the cornerstone of our communities, providing equitable access to education regardless of socioeconomic status. School choice vouchers redirect critical funding away from these institutions, leaving public schools—already underfunded in many areas—struggling to meet the needs of their students. This disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, where public schools often rely on state and federal funding to provide essential services.

2. **Lack of Accountability in Private Schools** Unlike public schools, private schools are not held to the same accountability standards for curriculum, teacher certification, or student outcomes. This lack of oversight means that marginalized students, particularly those with disabilities or language barriers, may not receive the support they need. Parents may also lack the resources to fully assess the quality of the private schools they choose, leaving students at risk of falling further behind.

3. **Increasing Segregation**

School choice vouchers have been shown to increase segregation by race, income, and ability. Private schools may have admissions policies that exclude students with higher needs, such as those requiring special education or English language support. As a result, marginalized students are more likely to remain in underfunded and resource-strapped public schools, deepening existing disparities.

4. **Failing to Address Root Causes**

Rather than investing in vouchers, state departments of education should focus on addressing the systemic issues that hinder educational equity. This includes increasing funding for public schools, reducing class sizes, expanding access to mental health resources, and implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. These measures directly benefit marginalized students and create a more inclusive and equitable education system.

5. **Undermining Community Cohesion**

Public schools serve as vital community hubs, bringing together families from diverse backgrounds. School choice vouchers risk fragmenting communities, as families leave public schools for private options. This weakens the collective commitment to public education and diminishes opportunities for students to learn and grow in diverse environments.

In conclusion, while school choice vouchers may appear to offer increased opportunities, the reality is that they undermine public education and disproportionately harm marginalized students. I urge the Department of Education to reject this policy and instead prioritize strengthening our public schools to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to a high-quality education.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will take these concerns into account as you deliberate this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Penny Sheppard

[REDACTED]

sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:56 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: REJECT public funding of private schools!

[REDACTED]

I'm a retired public school teacher. My children haf and my grandchildren are receiving public education.
Our public schools need more funding not less.
I believe in the separation if church and state.
Teresa Hartnett

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 6:58 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Voucher programs

[REDACTED]

SC Senate,

My name is Madalina Jones and I live in Tega Cay, York County. I am a parent and community member, and I am concerned about the voucher legislation. In addition to protecting the funding for our local schools, we need to ensure - as a society - that public education serves every student. I think the proposed voucher legislation puts students from disadvantaged homes, as well as students with disabilities, at increased risk. Statistically speaking, in states where voucher programs have been implemented without any mechanisms ensuring easy accessibility for the most vulnerable populations (low income or kids with disabilities), the result has been a drastic divide between wealthy/poor, abled/disabled. If vouchers are to be proposed, please consider income caps to ensure that students from undeserved areas or those who possess limited resources can easily access them.

Your constituents are trusting you to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few.

Sincerely,

Madalina Jones
Parent - Fort Mill School District

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 7:14 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Monitor Voucher Legislation in SC Public Education

[REDACTED]

SC Senate,

My name is Nate Knight, and I am honored to call Rock Hill, SC my home. As a passionate public educator in York School District 1, my heart resonates deeply with the mission of serving every child who walks through our school doors. But I find myself rising with urgency as I voice my concerns over the looming threat of voucher legislation. We must fiercely protect the funding for our local schools—the sanctuaries that nurture and educate EVERY student who seeks knowledge and growth.

What weighs heavily on my heart is the fate of those from disadvantaged backgrounds and the precious students living with disabilities. Private schools have the power to choose who they welcome into their classrooms, and alarmingly, only a mere 1.5 to 3% of voucher recipients in other states are those with disabilities. This painful reality underscores a more significant issue: we are witnessing a heartbreaking divide along the lines of race, socio-economic status, and ability.

If voucher policies are to be considered, I implore you to advocate for income caps that will ensure our most underserved children—those who lack access due to their circumstances—are granted the opportunities they deserve. Growing up in a low-income household, I understand firsthand how vital it is for every student, regardless of their financial situation, to have equal access to quality education. It is not just about affording an opportunity; it's about creating a fair chance for ALL.

Moreover, we must open our arms wide to include students with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds. As someone who has navigated life with a learning disability, I can affirm that bridging this gap is not just a moral obligation; it is a crucial step towards nurturing success for every learner.

We are placing our trust in you to craft policies that truly reflect the heart and soul of South Carolina—a commitment to ALL our children, not just a privileged few.

Thank you for your tireless dedication to our state and for championing the future of our aspiring learners and thinkers. Your work shapes lives, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

Sincerely,

Nate Knight

Science Educator

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 7:31 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Input for December 10, 2024 Meeting

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee Members,

I vehemently oppose diverting public education funds to private or religious schools by any methods. Public funding requires public accountability. Private and religious schools are not accountable under ADA, IDEA, or other federal and state laws. They are not accountable to the SC Dept of Education for learning outcomes.

I was the guardian of my granddaughter for nine years. She has multiple disabilities: autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, and anxiety. In Sumter where I live, there are no private or religious schools that could meet her needs. While the public schools struggled, they tried and when they failed, they were held accountable because of state and federal laws. Then they tried again.

If the South Carolina legislature diverts the already meager funding from public to private/religious schools, what options do students like my granddaughter have?

--

Wanda Little Fenimore, Ph.D.

Learn more about my books:

Nikki Haley's Lessons from the New South

The Rhetorical Road to Brown v. Board of Education: Elizabeth and Waties Waring's Campaign

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 7:55 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No tax dollars for private schools

[REDACTED]

Please do not use public tax dollars to fund private schools. Public schools do not have alternative methods of raising funds like private schools. People don't do fund raisers for public schools. Private schools pick and choose the students they accept, often discriminating against students with disabilities and other "difficult" students. Public schools must accept, and succeed in educating, all students. As a resident with no children of my own, the availability of a free education for any and every child is extremely important to me. An educated population is vital to a successful democracy. Diverting public tax dollars to private institutions is not in the best interests of the citizens of South Carolina.

Keith

The way is not difficult for those without preferences

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:00 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Dec 10 subcommittee public input

[REDACTED]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the upcoming conversation around educational vouchers.

I am a mother of two boys — aged 11 and 16. I'm also married to a public school educator here in SC.


As you consider vouchers, I encourage you to not leave out the considerations of students with special needs and students from lower income homes. Please also take into consideration the funding that will leave our already underfunded schools.

Please include provisions to make sure there is equity for students regardless of family income levels. Historically this hasn't been done in others states and statistically lower income students are underserved by vouchers.


Please also include requirements for schools accepting vouchers to accommodate students of all eds. This is also something that hasn't been considered in others provisions.

Your duty is to all students in our great state. Please don't hesitate to reach out for further input.

Angela Sanford
[REDACTED]
Fort Mill, SC



Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:02 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposition to diverting public funds to private schools



I wholeheartedly support public education in South Carolina, as well as in other states. Dispersion of public funds to private schools via any method, as vouchers or scholarship programs, will weaken and undermine public education. The majority of South Carolina parents prefer to send their children to public schools. Diversion of public funds to the private school sector will take away the right of South Carolina children to receive a high quality public school education.

Paula Andrejko
Fort Mill, SC
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:09 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: SC public school funding

[REDACTED]

I am writing to stress the need for SC public school funding to remain in public schools. My children attended the Greenville County Public Schools and now my grandchild is in a Spartanburg District 5 elementary school.

I am opposed to using public school funds for private schools. Diversion of funds to private and religious schools impacts the funding and quality of education of those students in the public schools.

I respectfully ask that you support SC public schools with all the resources our state can provide. It's never enough and diverting money to private organizations damages our public school system even more.

Sincerely,
Denise Sudderth

--
Denise Sudderth

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:45 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers - Written Comments

[REDACTED]

Greetings,

My name is Lacey Layne of Fort Mill, South Carolina. I'm a mother of two school age children, a school counselor of 16 years, and an advocate for public education. I have major concerns about voucher legislation. Like a majority of South Carolinians, I believe that public funds belong in public schools. Public schools do not pick and choose their students like private schools do. Rather, public schools serve ALL students. They provide free transportation and access to free and reduced lunch for those who qualify - private schools do not. Voucher legislation thus far has not considered access for students from disadvantaged homes and students with disabilities nor has it required any type of accountability for private schools. If private schools receive public funds then their students should have to pass the same tests and other standards required of public schools.

If voucher expansion is proposed, please reject it in all forms. If you are in support of vouchers, then please consider income caps to ensure that the reach and access extends to students who may have limited access due to undeserved areas and lack of resources. As a parent of a child with special needs, I ask that you ensure access for ALL students including those with disabilities.

Please do not allow vouchers to be a coupon for the rich as they are now.

Thank you for your consideration.

Lacey Layne, MA, NBCT
Fort Mill, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 8:58 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public school funds for private schools

[REDACTED]

To Whom it may concern,

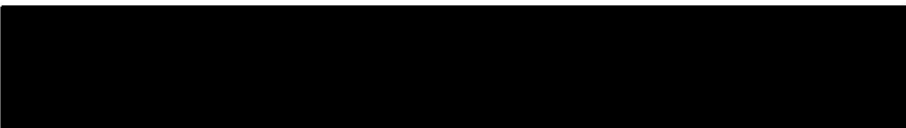
I am writing to voice my opposition to the use of public school funds for private or religious schools. Public schools and public education is important for our entire country and our state. We have long held that all citizens benefit from the education of all our children, whether you have children or not. If citizens wish to select a different avenue to educate their children, the financial burden is theirs. If public school funds were ever offered to religious or private schools, it would place the state in the position of evaluating and maintaining that their standards were up to those required by the public school. This would require additional money to be drained from the public sector.

And how would the state decide which religious schools could receive these diverted educational dollars. Is the state of South Carolina willing to fund Islamic, Hindu, Jewish schools? This is a slippery slope. I ask you to reconsider and keep public educational funds in public schools.

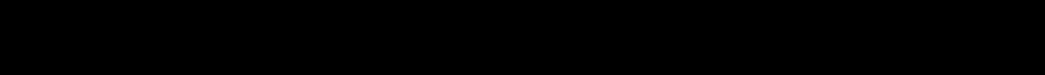
Thank you,

Sylvia Jean Gill

[REDACTED]



Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 9:25 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Friday vote



Please do not approve the vote on vouchers. It will not help the majority of our youth. South Carolinians should not pay for private schools when public school educate more children.

Thank you - Kathleen
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, December 3, 2024 10:11 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Fan López Hernández

[REDACTED]

López Hernández Family

We are very grateful to have been able to belong to this school and to this scholarship and financial aid program for our children, especially for my oldest son [REDACTED] who is in second grade since he is a child with special conditions and it has been a great change and support for him. Not only do we see him socially but also quite a bit in academics, he has excelled in every way in this new school with the help of his teachers, my other daughter is in kindergarten and has learned much more now. This decision to remove the support to pay my children's tuition has affected us in every way since [REDACTED] does not have medical coverage and the costs of his treatments and therapies are very high. Without this help it will be difficult to continue and I would not like for him to fall behind again in every way since I repeat he has excelled a lot, it has been a surprising change in his speech, his knowledge, his writing and above all he has made some beautiful friendships even though he had never achieved it before. I hope you make the best decision for our children who are the future of tomorrow, that they are the best decision in this world with their noble thoughts, with a huge heart that sees no evil. Thank you and God bless you always.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 8:48 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds and South Carolina's Education System

[REDACTED]

Senate Education Subcommittee,

As a parent who entrusts my children to South Carolina's public schools, I strongly oppose diverting public funds to support private or religious schools. This decision would have detrimental consequences for my children's education and pose a serious threat to our entire public education system.

Public money should be dedicated solely to our public schools. A recent study revealed that a substantial 90% of South Carolina parents prefer public education for their children. Moreover, voters in other states have consistently rejected proposals to subsidize private or religious schools with taxpayer dollars.

Our public school teachers are already underpaid and overburdened with excessive bureaucracy and the constant pressure from outside groups to influence curriculum. Diverting funds will exacerbate these issues, leading to increased teacher attrition and a decline in the quality of education.

Furthermore, as federal education funding faces potential cuts, South Carolina will inevitably face a significant funding gap. Diverting funds to private schools will only worsen this crisis.

When other states have implemented private school choice programs, they have experienced negative impacts on their state budgets. These programs often disproportionately benefit affluent families, while leaving low-income families behind.

As elected officials, you have a responsibility to ensure public funds are used wisely and effectively. Any private or religious school receiving public funds must be held accountable to the same rigorous standards as public schools, including financial transparency and public reporting of student academic performance on standardized tests.

As a parent of children in S.C.'s public schools, I urge you - please do not divert public funds to support private or religious schools!

Rebecca Anderson

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 9:29 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Say NO to public funds to support private or religious schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships,

Redirecting public funds to support private or religious schools threatens public education in South Carolina.

My three children attended public schools in SC and I taught special education in our public schools for over a decade. I have seen first hand students coming in and out of private schools and charter schools and I have seen and experienced firsthand the struggles of students of poverty and students with disabilities. They need fully funded public education. Our society and economy need this.

The majority of voters back public schools, with about 90% of parents in the state expressing a preference for public schools. Previous ballot measures in other states regarding private school funding have consistently been met with voter opposition, indicating strong disapproval of utilizing public resources for private or religious education.

In states where vouchers and scholarship initiatives have been implemented, most funds have benefitted families whose children were already enrolled in private schools. While these programs were initially marketed as a means to assist underprivileged students, evidence suggests that the majority of those receiving support from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar initiatives are families already choosing private education.

Families in rural and low-income areas often find these voucher and scholarship programs inaccessible, as few private schools exist in those regions, and the financial support provided doesn't typically cover the total costs of tuition alongside essential expenses like transportation and meals.

The distribution of public funds necessitates public accountability. Legislators must ensure the responsible use of taxpayer money, and any private or religious institutions receiving such funds should adhere to the same educational benchmarks as public schools. These benchmarks encompass financial transparency and the public disclosure of academic performance, utilizing standardized assessments identical to those used for public school students. Using public funds for private or religious schools threatens public education in South Carolina. Most voters support public schools, with about 90% of parents wanting to send their children to them. When private school funding has been proposed in other states, it has often been rejected.

Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states mainly benefit families whose children already attend private schools. While these programs aim to help students in poverty, most beneficiaries come from families that already choose private education.

Families in rural and low-income areas usually cannot access these programs because few private schools are available, and the funds often do not cover full costs like tuition and transportation.

Public funds must be used responsibly. Lawmakers should ensure that any private schools receiving these funds meet the same educational standards as public schools, including financial transparency and standardized testing.

Private schools can have discriminatory admission practices, which may disadvantage students with disabilities or those from racial, ethnic, or LGBTQ+ backgrounds. Thus, public funds should not support discriminatory schools.

“Universal choice” may lead to budget problems. Groups seeking to privatize K-12 education often weaken public schools, and states that provide all parents the option for private schools have seen negative effects on funding.


Private institutions can engage in discriminatory practices regarding admissions. They have the autonomy to establish their own policies, which could lead to discrimination against students with disabilities and other marginalized groups, such as racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals. Thus, public funds should not be allocated to schools that practice discrimination.

Implementing “universal choice” could lead to significant budgetary challenges. Various influential, profit-driven organizations advocate for the privatization of K-12 education, seeking to diminish the support for public schooling. In states that have allowed all parents access to private school options, the repercussions on state funding have been detrimental.


Thank you for your consideration,

Melissa Nettles

Florence, SC



Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 9:48 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public funds



I am opposed to diverting public funds to private and religious schools. The research from other states supports the fact that the monies do not help those who need it most. Please do not divert these much-needed funds from public schools.

Thank you,
Mary Ann Brearley

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 9:55 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School Funding and Vouchers

[REDACTED]

To the legislators and committee members this concerns:


As a public school educator in SC for the past 16 years, I find it continually disheartening to perpetually thwart efforts to funnel public funds into private schools. There are even counties and districts across the state which do not even have private schools to offer, much less private schools that would actually accept all or even most applicants, and/or schools that would be attainable for families, with of course the vouchers that so many folks keep asserting will level the proverbial playing field.

It is no secret that SC ranks lower than we should/could/would in many things, particularly education. There is a wealth of research exploring the perceived benefits of school vouchers for private schools (and privatizing public ed in general), and the bulk of the research is clear: public money belongs in public schools. No one (at least that I am aware of) is suggesting that private schools be dismantled or otherwise defunded, and yet folks without direct experience in public schools continue to make policies and laws that undermine and effectively shortchange public schools and services to the detriment of our students and staff.


We keep hearing from Gov McMaster about a surplus -- when ALL SC public schools are properly funded and possess the realized potential for high performance in academics, sports, and the arts, then maybe the private schools could get some more consideration, but really, why should private schools receive money designated for the public good? If they want public school funds, they should have to adhere to all the rigamarole that public schools do, too, at the very least. Until then, we're talking about two very different experiences and sets of opportunities.

Please do not endorse any policy or legislation that redirects monies from public to private schools. It is a problematic practice at the very least, and it is NOT in the spirit of lifting ALL students. Educators are begging you to stop this nonsense and support us in the trenches instead of capping us in the knees.

Jessica White
Irmo, SC



Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 10:10 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diversion of public school funds



As a retired school psychologist, I'd like to share with you my profound opposition to any plan to that diverts public school funds to private or religious schools. Our schools are already being asked to do so much with so little. Any diversion of funds would be a significant blow. If folks choose to go the private school route, they should do so at their own expense and not at the expense of children in public schools.

Dr. Patricia Pruitt
Chapin
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 10:22 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds - Private/Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

I am totally OPPOSED diverting public funds to subsidize PRIVATE OR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS. These funds are not equally available to most families in rural and low income, communities. Private or religious schools that except search funds should be held to the same educational standards and accountability required by public schools, along with no discrimination against students with disabilities or other minority groups.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Donna O. Johnson

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPad
Donna Johnson

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 10:47 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposition to School Vouchers: Protecting the Future of South Carolina's Public Education System

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express deep concern about the potential expansion of school voucher programs in South Carolina. As a state that has long grappled with educational disparities, the implementation of these programs would exacerbate inequality, harm public schools, and fail to deliver the promised academic improvements.

Research consistently shows that school vouchers have a devastating impact on public education systems and the communities they serve. Here are five critical reasons South Carolina must reject such programs:

1. **Lower Academic Achievement:** In states like Louisiana and Ohio, voucher programs resulted in significant drops in student performance. For example, Louisiana voucher students experienced a decline equivalent to moving from the 50th to the 34th percentile in math after just three years, with negative impacts persisting over time

Brookings

Center for American Progress

2. **Undermining Public School Funding:** Vouchers divert essential resources away from public schools. South Carolina's public education system, which already faces funding challenges, risks further degradation as funds are redirected to private institutions. Research shows that states with expanded voucher programs often see declining public school performance due to reduced resources

Brookings

3. **Increased Segregation:** Voucher programs often funnel public money into private schools that were historically established to avoid desegregation, known as "segregation academies." In South Carolina, 12 such schools received state voucher funds, perpetuating racial and socioeconomic divides that public education seeks to bridge

ProPublica

- .
4. **Higher Tuition Costs and Limited Access:** Voucher programs frequently lead to tuition hikes in private schools, effectively turning public subsidies into private profits. This restricts access for low-income families, undermining the very premise of educational choice

Brookings

Center for American Progress

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5. **Lack of Accountability and Quality Control:** Private schools receiving voucher funds are not held to the same standards as public schools, often lacking certified teachers, standardized testing, and transparency in financial management. This creates an environment where students receive a lower quality education without proper oversight

Brookings

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The promise of "choice" through vouchers is an illusion for many families, especially in rural and low-income areas where private school options are limited or non-existent. Instead of siphoning public funds into private entities, we must focus on strengthening our public schools, ensuring equitable funding, and expanding access to quality education for every child in South Carolina.

I urge you to stand against the expansion of school voucher programs and prioritize policies that invest in public education, the foundation of a strong and vibrant community.

Sincerely,

Christine Simmons

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 10:54 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public School funding

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

I am writing to ask you to *not* divert public school funds to support private schools. It has been proven doing so generally only benefits wealthier families who are already sending their children to private school. As a social worker and a mother, accessible quality education is very important to me. Public schools deserve and need this funding. As about 90% of South Carolina parents prefer to send their children to public schools, I know I am not alone in my concerns. Please think of our children. Their future depends on us.

Thank you,
Anna Grace Clover

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 11:15 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: oppose sending public money to private or religious schools via any method

[REDACTED]

As a resident of Fort Mill, SC, I want to voice my opposition to sending public money to private or religious schools in any way.

Voters support public schools

About 90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools. When private-school funding options were on the ballot in other states, voters rejected spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools.

Better Use of Funds—Why not invest funds in public schools' teacher salaries and classroom supplies where those needs are well established?

Unnecessary funding for the rich

Experience from other states have shown us that vouchers and scholarship programs have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools.

Private schools can discriminate against minorities.

Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.

Carol Injaychock

Carol Injaychock -
[REDACTED]

Blog:
<https://word-press.com/home/matters-of-the-hearts.com>

Book: Matters of the Heart--A Cancer Journey - available Amazon.com
her books

https://www.amazon.com/dp/061579906X/ref=rdr_ext_tmb

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 12:09 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Say NO to public funding of private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Sirs:

I am a resident of Mt Pleasant, SC. My children attended Charleston County public schools. The separation of church and state is a fundamental tenet of our constitution; I urge you to stop all efforts to fund private schools with public school money.

Sincerely,

Susan B. Thompson, DVM

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 1:11 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: I oppose state funding of private schools

[REDACTED]

Hello,
Please do not allocate any taxpayer money to fund vouchers for private schools. Would you subsidize families who prefer that their children join a country club swimming pool rather than use a free public pool? Any parent who wants his or her children to attend private schools should pay for it, themselves.
Sharon Fratepietro

[REDACTED]


December 2, 2024

Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships
402 Gressette Building
P.O. Box 142
Columbia, SC 29202
seducomm@scsenate.gov

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

December 10, 2024 Room 308 re: K-12 Education Scholarships

As an older citizen and taxpayer in South Carolina, I oppose continuing this endeavor to provide "school choice" options under government law and at the expense of all the citizens of this state. Particularly for those of us on a fixed income, this additional financial and tax burden is unacceptable. There appear to be numerous arguments about the supposed minimal or non-existent financial impact on the public, as well as the weaponization of "compassion" that is used to justify trying to help those supposedly in need. In actuality defenses of this effort are presented from an inaccurate view of both the financial dangers and the real goals of "school choice" legislation.

Legislation of this nature is really a clever way to continue the efforts of those who promote state control of education by enticing people to support government-run programs. Such laws will eventually and surely remove any vestige of educational freedom and true choice. I suggest reviewing the many pertinent articles published on the ConservaTruth.com website for a better understanding.

One of the most concerning aspects of these schemes is that they all continue widespread policies that foster redistribution of wealth. There has been long-term indoctrination and acceptance of a plethora of redistribution of wealth programs in this state and country under many categories, but acceptance of them does not make these programs good. Redistribution often comes, as in the case of older taxpayers on fixed incomes, with the reality of taking from those in need in order to give it to others deemed more deserving. It behooves each of you to acquire a better understanding of "school choice," who will be paying the price, and what the consequences will be.

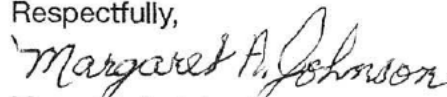
My comments are based on considerable background, having first been recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in education in the 1970s. As early as the 70s, ideas such as vouchers and other schemes to make it easier for more people to afford alternative educational choices and avoid public schools were being debated. However, the dangers to freedom and the inevitability of increasing government strings and controls prevented such ideas from going very far. It is interesting to see that there is now a resurgence of these schemes.

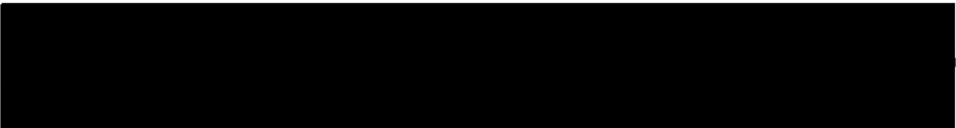
Thank you for taking on this investigation. Should there be any opportunity for the public to meet with or present testimony before this committee or any interested members, please notify me. I would be glad to present some clarifying perspectives and information.

I will be following this legislation closely. Please do not pursue these dangerous schemes any further. We have enough law in this state, especially about education. Legislators should be streamlining our statutes, protecting educational freedom, and allowing parents to take responsibility for and maintain their right to choose their children's upbringing and educational environment. Please go no farther with this issue and do no more damage.


Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,


Margaret A. Johnson



Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 1:30 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School funding



To whom it may concern, I am a South Carolinian who attended public schools in Columbia throughout the 1960's. My fine education prepared me for graduate school and seminary before a career as a Presbyterian pastor. I feel strongly that the job of the legislative process is to protect and strengthen the funding for public education in South Carolina. More students benefit when public schools are strengthened, and more students are hurt when public monies are diverted to private schools. KEEP PUBLIC SCHOOLS STRONG. Thank you. Sincerely, Rev. Robert M. Brearley Sent from my iPad

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 1:38 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: Michael Johnson
Subject: South Carolina Constituent // School Voucher Legislation

SC Senate,

I am a parent and South Carolina constituent living in Fort Mill. Care for my local community and my Christian faith compel me to share my concerns over the possibility of school voucher legislation in South Carolina.

Public schools operate on the principle of universal access and equity, aiming to serve all children regardless of background, ability, or socioeconomic status. This speaks directly to the God-given value of each person in my community. Our local school board is held accountable by our community to ensure that we meet the needs of all our children.

In contrast, school voucher programs prioritize funneling public funds into private institutions that are not held to the same inclusivity standards and do not have a school board voted on by our local community. Using public funds to support exclusive education, at the expense of vulnerable children, is both unAmerican and unChristian. School vouchers deprive public schools of needed funds and deny our community the right to hold the use of those funds accountable. Public school vouchers are one step towards taxation without representation.

No one denies parents the right to use a private institution to educate their children if they so desire. However, using public funds to do so shifts power out of the hands of your local constituents. The only way to rectify this would be to require all schools accepting funds to serve all children regardless of background, ability, or socioeconomic status and to allow local communities to hold those institutions accountable through voting – WHICH BRINGS US RIGHT BACK TO OUR CURRENT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM. We do not need the added bureaucracy of a second publicly run school system. We do not need legislators attempting to advance redundant government institutions bogged down with additional bureaucratic infrastructure. We do not need to funnel funds to vouchers. What we need is to properly fund our current public school and legislators who listen to and work for the good of their constituents.

South Carolina is a big state with diverse needs. Every child needs an education and public school should prepare students for participation in our free and democratic society. Local communities should be the ones voting and deciding on how best to do that in their community. When changes need to be made, local communities should be making those decision – NOT unaccountable, exclusive private schools who use public tax dollars but don't have to answer to the community. These private schools are often headquartered out of state, further reducing the voting power of South Carolinians and placing it in the hands of people who do not live in our local communities.

Again, parents are welcome to decide that they want an educational program that prioritizes religious teaching, particular curricula, or a unique skill. They are free to make that choice and hold their school accountable as they see fit. However, public funds should be used for public goods that benefit our local communities holistically. School vouchers cannot do that.

Reject taxation without representation and instead support the civic autonomy of local South Carolina communities.

Sincerely,

Heather Hart

Constituent SC Senate District 16

Constituent SC House District 66

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 1:55 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds for for profit private and religious schools

[REDACTED]

I am against providing public funds for, for profit private and religious schools. Please do not sign any legislation that will compromise public education.

1. They are not open to all children.
ie. religion, disability, income
2. They can set their own educational standards
ie. curriculum
3. They do not have to conform to public school standards
ie; teacher qualifications, salaries, class size, not for profit

I would appreciate a response. Please verify that you have received this email.

Thank you

Wayne Goodman
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 2:13 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No to Vouchers

Good Afternoon,

As the subcommittee on education gets ready to meet I wanted to express my views on voucher programs. I have been in education for over 20 years and have worked at the local, state, and national level.

My concern with vouchers is that they divert public tax dollars away from our public schools and subsidize wealthy parents who choose to send their students to private school. Additionally, I believe it is unethical and unconstitutional to send public funds to private schools that do not have to adhere to the same requirements as public schools. These schools should be held to a higher standard, but instead are allowed to deny special education services to students with disabilities and be selective in how they choose to serve. These schools are also not held to the same testing standards meaning we are wasting our tax money with no accountability. Our tax money should support all students.

I urge you to please stop any legislation that supports voucher programs for private schools.

an Froemel
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 2:52 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: SC resident OPPOSITION to sending public \$ to private or religious schools by any method

[REDACTED]

Dear Distinguished Members of the Senate Education Committee,

First, thank you for your public service to the good people of South Carolina. I write today as a parent, a retired 20+ year public school educator, an attorney, and a resident SC taxpayer. I ask you to vote against any filed bill which would provide public money to private or religious schools by any method.

1. I am in the supermajority of SC citizens who prefer public schools. In fact, About **90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools**. When private school funding options have been on the ballot in other states, voters have rejected the idea of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools.

2. **Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools and we do not want or need that in SC**. Although these programs were originally promoted as options to help students from poverty, experience in other states has shown that the **majority of parents who have benefited from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar programs have not been families from poverty**, but rather families who were already sending their students to private schools.

3. Disbursing public funds requires public accountability in SC. Lawmakers are accountable for responsible use of public money, and any **private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools**. These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.

4. Private schools can discriminate against minorities which is not our academic goal in SC. Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. **Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups**.

5. Offering "universal choice" risks serious budgetary consequences for SC schools. A variety of **dark-money groups** that promote privatization of K-12 education for profit seek to weaken and undermine public education. **When other states have offered private school options to all parents, the impact on state budget funding has been substantial**.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 3:35 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public money for private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to any method (vouchers, scholarships, etc) of using public money to pay for private schools

I think of public schools as akin to public roads. The citizens of this state pool our money through taxes for these resources. We don't pay for private roads or driveways. We shouldn't pay for private schools. The argument that vouchers give parents choice is true only for the few who live in the vicinity of a private school, **have a child whom the private school will admit** and have the money for additional items (uniforms, transportation) that the private school might require.

Our public schools are a precious resource. We should build them up, not tear them down.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Purcell

[REDACTED]



December 4, 2024

Dear Members of the Senate Education Subcommittee,

My name is Miranda Williams, Legislative Director for ExcelinEd in Action. Our organization works with state lawmakers and partner organizations to enact policies that empower families with educational opportunity, prepare students for college and career, prioritize early literacy grounded in the science of reading, expand innovation and strengthen school performance.

I am writing to express ExcelinEd in Action's support for the Committee meeting next week on the topic of K-12 education scholarships for South Carolina students. The issue of educational choice is top of mind for thousands of families, and we appreciate how quickly the Committee has convened to address possible solutions.

Due to the South Carolina Supreme Court's negative ruling in September, legislation to revive and make improvements to the program, and significantly expand education opportunities for thousands of students is imperative. This will give them the freedom to choose the educational environment that works best for them and, as a result, a better chance to succeed. Education savings accounts empower parents with educational freedom, giving families access to the schools, services and tools they need to meet their children's individual learning needs, including tuition, instructional materials, computer equipment and tutoring.

We urge you to continue to take swift action to ensure families have access to high-quality options that remove barriers and put the needs of students first.

Thank you for your consideration of this important policy.

Respectfully,

Miranda Williams
Legislative Director, Southeast
ExcelinEd in Action

[REDACTED]

ent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 4:54 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Funds for Private Education

[REDACTED]

I oppose sending public money to private or religious schools via any method. I am a firm supporter of public education and feel that if there is dissatisfaction with the current educational system we should look for ways to improve that system. I believe funding religious schools is a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. I also believe that we should use public funds to improve education in South Carolina, and using monies to support private educational programs will diminish the availability of needed resources for our public schools.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns.

Elaine Reimels. RN, PHD (retired)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent:

Wednesday, December 4, 2024 5:04 PM

To:

Senate Education Committee

Subject:

Voucher Bill Proposal

[REDACTED]

I am writing today to express my concerns about the voucher bill being considered for South Carolina families. While I fully support each family's right to choose the education that is best for their students, I have strong reservations regarding funding these choices with tax dollars. These are some of my concerns:

1. Private schools are not held to the same standards as public schools. How can we do an apples to apples comparison on success rates without measures such as standardized test results being available from both public schools and private schools receiving voucher funds?
2. Private schools do not have to provide transportation or free and reduced lunch programs. This makes them less accessible for families who are financially disadvantaged.
3. Private schools have selective admission practices. Public schools must admit all students. This has the potential to lead to less children with special learning needs having access to any advantages from vouchers, as has been seen in other states.
4. Our public schools are already underfunded based on per pupil spending set by our own legislative body. If we further defund public schools, how can we continue to recruit and retain teachers (important given our current teacher shortage) and offer children programs like sports, art education, music instruction and AP studies that benefits them and gives them a n advantage when applying to college or moving into careers?

Please consider these things before agreeing to support any voucher program for our state. I respectfully ask that vouchers NOT be a part of our plan for SC students. Instead, focus on fully funding public education.

Christine Dayton

Registered voter in Tega Cay, SC

[Get Outlook for iOS](#)

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 2:37 PM
Subject: Senate Education Committee
Diverting public funds to support private or religious schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Subcommittee members:

I oppose sending public funds to private or religious schools because it will take money away from public schools. Polls show that about 90% of parents support sending their children to public schools. Public schools in SC have rigorous educational standards to assure all of our children have the opportunity for a high quality education.

I am very concerned that private schools can set their own admissions policies and by doing this discriminate against others based on race, ethnicity, disability, those in poverty, and LGBTQIA+. Taking funding away from public schools is harmful and can impact the quality of public education.

Thank you for your work and please oppose any public funds going to private or religious schools.

Sincerely,

Nancy Whittle
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 5:16 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School Vouchers

[REDACTED]

1. Diverts Funds from Public Schools

- Vouchers take money that would otherwise fund public schools and redirect it to private institutions. Public schools, especially in low-income areas, often operate on limited budgets and rely heavily on state funding. Losing this money can further strain resources and compromise educational quality for students who remain in public schools.

2. Lack of Accountability for Private Schools

- Private schools are not held to the same standards of accountability as public schools. They may not be required to administer standardized tests, report performance metrics, or adhere to the same teacher certification standards. This can make it difficult to ensure that public funds are being used effectively.

3. Exacerbates Inequality

- Vouchers often do not cover the full cost of private school tuition, meaning wealthier families are more likely to benefit. Families with limited means may still be unable to afford private schools, even with a voucher, leaving public schools to serve a disproportionately higher number of low-income and special-needs students, which can lead to greater inequity in education.

4. Weakens Public School Systems

- When students leave public schools for private schools using vouchers, public schools lose not just funding but also students who may have been higher-performing. This can lead to a decline in overall public school performance, creating a cycle of underfunding and underperformance.

Potential for Discrimination

- Private schools are not bound by the same anti-discrimination laws as public schools. They can refuse admission based on religion, academic performance, or other criteria, leaving vulnerable students without equitable access to quality education.
-

6. Lack of Evidence for Improved Outcomes

- Studies on the academic outcomes of voucher programs have shown mixed results. In some cases, students using vouchers perform worse than their public school counterparts in subjects like math and reading. This raises questions about whether vouchers actually improve educational opportunities.
-

7. Undermines Public Education as a Public Good

- Public education is seen as a cornerstone of democracy, providing equal opportunity for all children regardless of background. Critics argue that vouchers shift focus away from improving public schools to privatizing education, weakening the collective investment in a system that serves everyone.
-

8. Religious and Ethical Concerns

- Many private schools are religiously affiliated, and using public funds to support them raises concerns about the separation of church and state. Some taxpayers may object to their money being used to fund education that includes religious instruction.
-

Conclusion

While school vouchers aim to increase choice for families, critics contend that they often do so at the expense of public education, deepening inequality, and weakening the very system meant to provide equitable education for all. Instead, many argue for investing in and improving public schools to ensure high-quality education is accessible to every child.

I DO NOT EXPECT OR WANT MY SCHOOL TAXES USED FOR SCHOOL VOUCHERS. THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS TO EVEN CONSIDER.

Sincerely

Connie Boswell



[REDACTED]

Sent:

Wednesday, December 4, 2024 5:23 PM

To:

Senate Education Committee

Subject:

This is unacceptable

[REDACTED]

And it is in violation of our children's constitutional rights!

Kind Regards,

Midori

"Lord, you will grant us peace; all we have accomplished is really from you."

Isaiah 26:12 NLT

[REDACTED]
To:
Subject:

Wednesday, December 4, 2024 5:46 PM
Senate Education Committee
Diverting public funds to support private schools

- [REDACTED]
- Voters support public schools. About **90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools.** When private school funding options have been on the ballot in other states, voters have rejected the idea of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools.
 - **Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools.** Although these programs were originally promoted as options to help students from poverty, experience in other states has shown that the **majority of parents who have benefited from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar programs have not been families from poverty,** but rather families who were already sending their students to private schools.
 - Educational Scholarship programs and vouchers are **not accessible to most families in rural and low-income communities** because few private schools serve rural communities and because the funds that have been offered for private school expenses are not sufficient to cover tuition plus other requisite expenses, such as transportation and meals.
 - Disbursing public funds requires public accountability. Lawmakers are accountable for responsible use of public money, and any **private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools.** These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.
 - Private schools can discriminate against minorities. Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. **Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.**
 - Offering "universal choice" risks serious budgetary consequences. A variety of **dark-money groups** that promote privatization of K-12 education for profit seek to weaken and undermine public education. **When other states have offered private school options to all parents, the impact on state budget funding has been substantial.**

I do not want my tax dollars spent on private schools

Joyce Miller

[REDACTED]

ent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 5:56 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Input on Diversion of Tax Dollars to Voucher Programs

[REDACTED]

As the December 10th meeting of the Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships approaches, I am expressing my input to mitigate or prevent damage to South Carolina's public schools. As a 24 year veteran public school teacher, I am well aware of the central place occupied by public schools in my community. Children, families, and the entire community are better off with a healthy public education system. All members of the community have a vested interest in an institution that is in place to benefit all. Even those whose children are grown and gone benefit from public schools because they keep communities unified and grounded in the realities of everyday life for residents. To tear this uniting fabric through religious or political partisan wrangling and machination is wrong and morally repugnant. America's public schools are a world-known hallmark of our democratic society. Let's work together to improve and support education for the families in rural and low-income communities, and students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students. These vulnerable groups are most likely to be left out of voucher programs, but will continue to need public education. I completely oppose the diversion of public tax dollars into voucher programs. Please keep in mind the impact in other states of irresponsible voucher programs that bankrupted state budgets. I urge you to take the input of this tax paying South Carolina residents into consideration when making your recommendations to the SC Legislature. Thank you for your attention to my comments.

Evelyn Nocella

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 5:59 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Protect public funds for public education

[REDACTED]

Members of the Subcommittee,

As a retired elementary school principal in the Fairfax County, VA Public Schools system, I speak knowledgeably and passionately about the importance of strong public schools. Quality public education benefits families, attracts businesses, and strengthens the available workforce. **South Carolina cannot afford to divert public funds to private and religious schools.**

Unlike public schools, these private entities have no obligation to serve students with special needs or those who require additional language and instructional intervention.

Unlike public schools, these private entities are not obligated to provide materials and transportation at no cost to families.

Unlike public schools, there are no standard accountability assessments that measure student progress, or lack thereof.

Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools. Diversion of public funds to private and religious schools will harm, not help, the large majority of South Carolina's children.

Please do all you can to safeguard our public education program—at any cost. Rather, **provide funding to strengthen public schools** to support South Carolina families, attract and retain a high quality workforce, and lay the foundation for our future.

Thank you for your continuing work on our behalf,

Mary Agnes Garman

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 7:15 PM
Subject: Senate Education Committee
School Voucher Legislation

[REDACTED]

Good evening.

My name is April Brown, and I am the parent of a middle school student in Fort Mill, SC. As a middle-class family, we moved to the Fort Mill School District so that our son could receive the best education possible, knowing we couldn't afford the average \$10k per year cost of private school tuition. However, proposed school voucher expansion now has the potential to threaten the quality of his public school education.

My son is thriving at school, and we're grateful to his teachers and school administrators for doing so much with already very lean budgets, time, and resources. But if public school funding is cut due to voucher expansion, all public school students will suffer diminished resources. I'm particularly concerned for some of my son's closest friends who struggle with learning disabilities or come from disadvantaged families. Public school funding for resources like IEP administration, bus transportation, and free/reduced lunch are critical for students' education and well-being.

If voucher expansion is proposed, I am asking that you please consider rejecting it. However, if you are in strong support of vouchers, please consider income caps to safeguard free and equal access to the quality education that lifts our whole community by supporting families and continuing to support future generations of our state's workforce.

Thank you for your consideration and for the work you do to serve all communities across South Carolina!

Sincerely,
April Brown
Fort Mill, SC

[REDACTED]
Sent:

To:

Subject:

Wednesday, December 4, 2024 7:40 PM
Senate Education Committee
voucher program

[REDACTED]
SC Senate,

My name is Tori Navey and I live in Fort Mill. I am a parent and a special educator. I have concerns about how students with disabilities will be affected. A very low number of students with special needs access vouchers in other states. This is likely because private schools often aren't equipped to meet these students' complex needs. I think we also need income caps, as well as considerations for transportation, so students from low income backgrounds have the amenities needed to provide the same access as children from wealthier backgrounds. I would much rather see funds go to public schools who serve all children. However, I appreciate your consideration of these factors should voucher legislation be proposed.

Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

Tori Navey

[REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 7:40 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: voucher program

[REDACTED]
SC Senate,

My name is Tori Navey and I live in Fort Mill. I am a parent and a special educator. I have concerns about how students with disabilities will be affected. A very low number of students with special needs access vouchers in other states. This is likely because private schools often aren't equipped to meet these students' complex needs. I think we also need income caps, as well as considerations for transportation, so students from low income backgrounds have the amenities needed to provide the same access as children from wealthier backgrounds. I would much rather see funds go to public schools who serve all children. However, I appreciate your consideration of these factors should voucher legislation be proposed.

Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

Tori Navey

[REDACTED]

To: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:37 AM
Senate Education Committee
Subject: Private School Vouchers

<[REDACTED]>

Dear members of our SC Senate,

As your constituent, I implore you to please vote against school vouchers and the private governance of public schools. You are convening on December 10 to discuss the K-12 Education Scholarships. Schools should not be privatized nor should vouchers be issued to families who are already taking up 95% of the seats in private schools and affording the tuition on their own. They would drain the state's and our public school funding, allowing room for very few new students to enroll. School vouchers benefit primarily the middle-upper class and those affording the private school tuition on their own. It is a path to make the wealthy wealthier and the poor poorer in a less funded school.

90% of SC parents prefer to send their children to public schools. Private schools can discriminate against minorities and set their own admission policies. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that can discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups (racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ+).

Dark-money groups that promote privatizing K-12 education for profit seek to weaken and undermine public schools. As demonstrated in the Charleston County School District (CCSD), public-private partnership schools have little to no transparency and accountability, raising serious concerns about the schools' governance, policymaking, budget decisions, and student acceptance and retention practices. Public-private partnership school takeovers displace school staff, and, if hired by the private company, educators lose state benefits and rights.

I adamantly oppose school vouchers. I hope you will too and stand up for public education for ALL South Carolinians.

Sincerely,

Your constituent Kathy Coskrey

Lexington, SC



[REDACTED]

ent: Wednesday, December 4, 2024 9:00 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Written Testimony for K-12 Educational Scholarships

[REDACTED]

Honorable Members of Education Subcommittee,

Thank you for serving the community and for considering my words. As a taxpayer in South Carolina, I care deeply about how my hard earned money is spent. I do not support educational scholarships that take money from public schools and send them to establishments that do not need to meet the same level of accountability and scrutiny that public schools undergo. Financial transparency and public reporting of academic achievement is a must for taxpayer dollars.

Additionally, our taxpayer dollars should stay in public schools where the vast majority of our children are taught. Public schools are already strained, but taking money away from them will only make the situation worse. In other states where vouchers have been implemented, they have seen the cost of private and religious schools rise. This is not a good investment of taxpayer dollars. Please keep public money in public schools. Keep it accountable and let's improve our public schools with that transparency and accountability.

Thank you for your time,
Nicole Sanchez

[REDACTED]

To:

Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:09 AM

Subject:

Senate Education Committee
Public funding

[REDACTED]

Please do not give public money to private and religious schools. I believe everyone is entitled to a good education. We chose to send our children to Montessori but we were willing to pay for this and did not expect the government to do this for us. Public Education is very important!

Thank you

Barbara Pickens

Anderson S. C.

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]
Sent:

Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:07 AM

To:

Senate Education Committee

Subject:

Funding

[REDACTED]
Reject public funding of private schools.
Debi Rieflin

[REDACTED]

ent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:19 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: public education

[REDACTED]

I am not in favor of diverting public funds to support private or religious schools in South Carolina.

[REDACTED]

From: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:10 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposition to Diverting Public Funds to Private/Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

To the members of the Senate Education Subcommittee,

I respectfully am submitting this comment to encourage you all to carefully consider any bills/actions in the coming legislative sessions that would send public money to subsidize private or religious schools. Disbursing public funds requires public accountability. As our state lawmakers, you are accountable for the responsible use of public money, and any private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.

Thank you for your thoughtful and dedicated time to ensuring that our education systems in the state are equitable, successful and supportive of all South Carolina youth regardless of economic status, religion and other protected classes.

Emily Vogelgesang

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:05 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Comments

[REDACTED]

The very existence of private schools makes public schools worse by diverting funds away from students who need them the most. Additionally, the complete lack of oversight in private schools — especially religious schools — means that they could just be teaching our children whatever nonsense they want with no regards to truth or future prospects. If we don't support our public schools, we'll end up with a whole state of kids who can barely read. We shouldn't be burning our tax dollars at the altar of suburbia.

Also, teachers across the board should get a higher salary! I would be a history teacher right now if I thought I could make a living on my own off of it, but I've seen how all my other teacher friends have struggled to make ends meet. If we want to make sure our kids are getting the highest quality education possible, we need to support people becoming teachers. Not only will we have smaller class sizes (proven to help with education!), but we'd be able to fire and replace teachers who aren't doing their jobs right! Lets spend less money on cops who just sit around playing candy crush in the hallways, and more money on giving our children the best future possible!

[REDACTED]

From: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:13 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public school funds

[REDACTED]

Members of the Subcommittee:

I oppose any use of public education funds for private schools. As a taxpayer I hope you are representing the viewpoint of SC citizens. The very nature of private schools allows selectivity, denial of opportunities, removal at will, and lack of accountability. The public school meanwhile works feverishly to educate every student under scrutiny at the local and state level.

Where do students go when the private school removes them from their roster? Back to a public school. But, those tax dollars will remain with the private school for the rest of the school year.

Public schools are ubiquitous. Private schools are established only where a potential student body resides. Rural students are strongly affected when public education tax dollars are diverted elsewhere -- to more populous communities where private schools are an option. That option is not available to all students.

As far as fiscal responsibility, states that have adopted a "voucher" system have shown that after a short few years, families are receiving vouchers who would have chosen and were able to send their child to private school without a voucher.

Education tax dollars are for public schools. To allow otherwise is to fail the children of South Carolina.

Sincerely,
Sherri Pankratz

[REDACTED]

[Get Outlook for iOS](#)

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:36 AM
Subject: Senate Education Committee
Vouchers

[REDACTED]

People sending their children to private schools do not need government subsidies from tax payers. Over 90% of vouchers go to families that already had their children in private school.

This amounts to an entitlement for the wealthy and well off and should not be allowed in a small government agenda.

Public school improvement should be addressed not defunded through vouchers.

Michelle Hager
Managing Partner

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:08 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public comment against the use of state funds for private schools

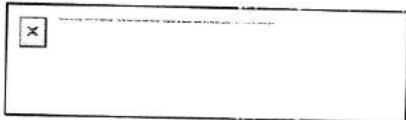
[REDACTED]

Hello,

My name is Tayler Simon. I am a concerned resident of the state of South Carolina who wants to urge the Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships to reconsider the use of vouchers for families to use for private schools. While this initiative looks like it would help families in South Carolina on the surface, the most vulnerable families in our low-income and rural communities still won't have access to these private schools because they would still face additional barriers these vouchers would not cover, such as transportation to school, purchasing expensive uniforms, and paying for extracurriculars and school trips that might socially isolate these students.

Our public schools in South Carolina are already suffering and are at a disadvantage. Sending our children to private schools with public funds is not the answer to fixing our education system. We should be using these funds to pay teachers and school staff a livable wage, provide resources to underserved schools, provide curriculum updates, fix dilapidated and outdated infrastructures, and develop the failing schools in our state. I am very passionate about public education and its role in creating well-formed citizens and free thinkers. I want our public education to be a true rival of private institutions by providing *quality* education for *all* our children in South Carolina.

Thank you for your time and protecting public education in South Carolina.



she/her/hers

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[Donate to our Liberation Fund](#)

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:19 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No public funds for private school vouchers scheme

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

The court said once again that public funds could not be used for private school vouchers. And yet, GOP legislators are once again trying to find a way around this. I'm tired of this fight, but not tired enough to quit.

The truth is these vouchers are just a discount coupon for families that already attend private schools and can already afford them. Meanwhile, public schools that serve ALL students would have less funding to operate. These private schools have no accountability and don't have to take the standardized tests that public schools are required to administer, but yet are free to choose to discriminate against students with special needs, LGBTQ students, etc. School choice is when private schools get to choose their student body, not the other way around. Using public funds for private school is still unconstitutional.

Jill Slapnik

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:27 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Keep taxpayer money in public schools

[REDACTED]

To the Committee:

I'm a voter in downtown Charleston and I'm writing in opposition to any effort to provide SC taxpayer-supported vouchers for use in private schools. Public education is a cornerstone of democratic society and the vast majority of citizens favor public schools as the best and most equitable way to educate our children. The SC public education system ranks now nationally in terms of performance and investment, and if we are to make the system better for all (particularly including our low income populations), it requires funding and not a diversion of dollars towards public or religious schools whose support. Let private school parents and schools continue to educate the population that chooses them, driven by parental funding and donations. Public education is fundamental and being able to hold schools accountable for funding and student outcomes requires public administration.

I support the league of women voters' efforts in SC to lobby against this measure. Thank you for your attention.

Cara Erickson
Charleston 29401

[REDACTED]

From: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:32 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: Greg Hembree
Subject: Education Subcommittee meeting -12-10-24 on K-12 funding

[REDACTED]

TO MEMBERS OF EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON FUNDING K-12 EDUCATION

Dears Senators:

For some years I have followed the diligent work of the Senate Education Committee and I particularly appreciate their work a couple sessions ago in advancing a Loan Reimbursement Program for primary care health providers who practice in underserved areas of the State. Unfortunately that initiative failed to advance to a Senate vote, and it is my hope that such a program will again be considered.

As regards funding education in the State, I am a strong believer in a robust public education system as a back bone of our free and democratic system. I do not believe public funds should be used to support education in private schools as they would be through a voucher program. I think that the State Legislature should strongly consider measures that will increase teacher salaries in public schools, support and encourage measures that will enhance and strengthen the work of local school boards, and encourage parents to be involved in their local public school system.

I do think there is a role for quality private schools, but this should be an option that does not involve the diversion of public, tax generated dollars.

Thank you for your consideration.

Richard Granse M.D.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:41 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds Remaining with South Carolina Public Schools

[REDACTED]

Good morning, Senators.

My name is Susan Hunter, and I have lived in South Carolina for 12 years at [REDACTED]. While I am a resident of the state who sent my three children to Greenville County Public Schools (Mauldin High School - class of 2019, 2020, and 2022), I also have the privilege of being an Independent Educational Consultant helping students through the college admissions process through my business, Admissions Coach, LLC. A few of your colleagues' (Senators and House of Reps) nieces and nephews who have attended Greenville County Schools have used my services. I have worked at five universities in three states in undergraduate and graduate enrollment management before doing private consulting.

Each year, I work with over 120 students (mainly from South Carolina but also in 20 states) to help with the college admission process. In South Carolina, I work with almost every public and private high school in Greenville County, plus other schools in the state. I truly admire the work of all teachers. However, I know there are far greater challenges that teachers face in the public school setting, and their work is pivotal for our state to succeed and for students to lead productive lives.

If you take away the funding for South Carolina public schools and redistribute public funding in the form of vouchers to religious schools, it will have a devastating impact on the lives of so many. Dedicating funding for private schools will lead to further inequity in education, creating a bigger divide in socio-economic groups. You will create a "have" vs. "have not" system" which creates "winners" and "losers" in our society.

In helping over 131 high school students this year, I see the value of public education, and so do public and private universities across the country. If you look at the data, you will see that more students are accepted to universities from public high schools than private ones. Why? Universities see that students at public high schools are not coddled but have real-world exposure and hard consequences. Private high schools often act as bubbles within society which will not lead to considering some of our most urgent issues in the state of South Carolina and our nation. Looking at data and my own experience of SC Charter High Schools and religious schools versus public high schools, there are also horrible consequences for parents choosing to send students to non-public high schools.

First of all, top students often are not accepted to prestigious universities because of skepticism of academic quality at a community college or private schools. Furthermore for schools like Christ Church or St. Joseph's, students actually choose to leave the state rather than attend South Carolina public universities. Do you want more academically-driven students to leave South Carolina to attend schools outside of the state? That could be a direct consequence. Secondly, fewer students who attend religious or charter high schools do not receive scholarships, like the Palmetto Fellows, because the

class sizes are so small. Reaching a top 6% ranking is impossible. Every year, we see the consequence of a high school choice affecting scholarship potential in private school systems like Christ Church, St. Joseph's, or Southside Christian.

When you consider the legislation before you, please know that in Greenville County- the 44th largest school district in the country- where innovative teaching is occurring like at CTE's Roper Mountain Science Center or, the Fine Arts Center, or any of the public high schools from Southside to JL Mann to Hillcrest, your actions to take away funding will deeply hurt students, families, educators, and the future of our state. There will be tremendous consequences.

Please make ethical decisions that will impact the Common Good of the entire state of South Carolina. I urge you to consider these points and reject the legislation whereby religious schools will take away funding from public education. There is a place for religious schools in our state, but they do not need funding to continue operating.

Best,

Susan Hunter



[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 11:05 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 Education Scholarships

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my dissent about the proposal to divert public education funds to vouchers for "education scholarships" to attend private institutions. These vouchers overwhelmingly do not benefit students in need and are overwhelmingly utilized by those who already are not attending public schools. The scholarships do nothing but take away from the already abysmally deficient funding South Carolina provides for public education for the students who attend public school; such as my 3 young boys, two of whom are special needs and have benefited from speech, occupational, and reading intervention provided by our public school system (our eldest has grown from requiring speech therapy to attending the South Carolina Governors School for Arts and Humanities for vocal performance and that would not have been possible without funding for public schools); and from the dedicated educators who work in these schools. This is a shameful abuse of these taxpayer funds and I urge the senate subcommittee to immediately drop this proposal.

Signed a concerned parent,

Sarah Todd

Sarah McCall Todd, LISW-CP, PMH-C
She/Her/Hers

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 11:30 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Voucher Legislation

[REDACTED]

SC Senate,

My name is Jane Riley Gambrell and I live on the Isle of Palms in Charleston County. I am a grandparent , great grandparent , a retired teacher and a retired director of a community- based not for profit . I have concerns about the possible voucher legislation. I think it is vital that we protect funding for our local schools that serve every student. As a retired CEO of Communities In Schools , I'm most concerned about access for students from disadvantaged homes and children with disabilities . Private schools can choose who to educate. Only 1.5 to 3% of kids receiving vouchers in other states are students with disabilities. We have also seen a divide between races and socio-economic status, abled and disabled.

If vouchers are to be proposed, please consider income caps to ensure that the reach and access extends to students who may have limited access due to undeserved areas and lack of resources. Please also ensure access for all, including students with disabilities.

Your constituents are trusting you to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few.

Thank you for all your work in our state.

Sincerely,
Jane Riley Gambrell
Retired Educator

[REDACTED]

To:

Thursday, December 5, 2024 12:27 PM

Subject:

Senate Education Committee
Public Education

[REDACTED]

Dear Representatives,

Please do not - Do Not - weaken public education in our state by using our tax dollars to support private education. The reasons are too numerous to spell out here. If you need cogent reasons to oppose using public money for private education just log onto any League of Women Voter's site.

If you will not use public funds to support private health care for women, then don't support private education for xchildren using public monies.

Sincerely,
Lydia Freund
Citizen.



PALMETTO FAMILY ALLIANCE

December 10, 2024

The Honorable Greg Hembree, Chairman
Senate Education Committee
Post Office Box 142
Columbia, SC 29202

Dear Senator Hembree,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in advance of the Senate Education Committee's subcommittee hearing on Tuesday, December 10, 2024, regarding K-12 scholarships.

For those of us who are parents, we realize every child is unique. Each of them is made in the image of God and are gifted to their parents by God (Psalm 127:3). To maximize the learning potential and the educational experience of all children in South Carolina, legislation should be introduced, passed and signed into law which would provide all forms of school choice to all children in the Palmetto State.

Recognizing the primary responsibility for educating children belongs with parents (Proverbs 22:6), the board, staff, and supporters of Palmetto Family strongly support the implementation of school choice programs which would empower parents to pursue the best individualized educational programs for their children.

Numerous states throughout the country—including North Carolina and Florida here in the Southeast—have a long, successful history with school choice programs or have recently greatly expanded programs for their state's citizens. It's interesting to note that this fall while the South Carolina Supreme Court found in a narrow 3-2 decision our state's school choice was "unconstitutional" that the North Carolina legislature overrode Governor Roy Cooper's (D-NC) veto of a bill that provided school choice for more than 55,000 North Carolina students. Once again, South Carolina remains a "follower" rather than a "leader" on issues facing our state's citizens.



PALMETTO FAMILY ALLIANCE

The Honorable Greg Hembree
December 10, 2024
Page 2

In state after state, educational choice helps the educational achievement of all students—including those who still attend traditional public schools—while saving money.

While South Carolina has resisted many attempts at K-12 school choice options, it provides educational scholarships for college students, pre-K students and special needs students throughout the state.

For over five decades, South Carolina has provided tuition grants for students to attend our state's 21 independent colleges and universities. These students are also eligible for HOPE, LIFE and Palmetto Fellows Scholarships.

For nearly two decades, South Carolina provides scholarships through First Steps for pre-K students to attend private or religious pre-K programs.

For nearly a decade, South Carolinians may claim a tax credit for special needs students to attend a private or religious special needs program through Exceptional SC.

I deeply appreciate your continued leadership on providing school choice options to children in South Carolina. It is my hope and prayer that 2025 will be the year that South Carolina provides universal school choice options for students.

Thank you for your service in the South Carolina Senate. Please be assured of my prayers for you and your colleagues as you tackle this and other important issues before you in the legislative session.

Sincerely,

Steve Pettit
President

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 1:21 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Please keep public funds for public schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Education Subcommittee Member,

As a taxpayer and advocate for children affected by DSS involvement, I strongly urge you to keep public funds directed toward public schools where they belong. Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have ended up sending funds to families who were already able to send their children to private or religious schools. Taking funds from public schools to support these fortunate families is unnecessary and weakens the public schools on which 90% of South Carolina's children depend. Far from helping keep our communities strong, this takes money from those who can least afford it to favor the already privileged. Over time, this will only serve to stack the deck against those with the least resources, increasing inequality among South Carolina citizens.

Thank you for making good decisions for all South Carolinians, not just the privileged few.

Rebecca Howerton
Guardian ad litem
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 2:37 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Education scholarship Trust Fund

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

My name is Sandra Hernandez Coronel my daughter [REDACTED] is a sixth grader at St Joseph Catholic School in Anderson, SC. I can't express enough how amazed I am at the academic change in my daughter and how she is doing so much better at this school, we were really devastated when unfortunately the scholarship she was granted was taken away. I'm not going to lie I've spent sleepless nights worrying about how I was going to be able to cover her tuition and was so grateful when the donor stepped up for this school year. I really wish and pray the education scholarship will be reinstated I'm afraid if it doesn't and she goes back to public school (not that there is anything wrong with our public schools) she will struggle and fall behind like she has been this whole time. I feel like and have seen the difference it made being able to switch her to private school. Please reconsider your decision.

God bless

Thank you,

A concern parent,

Sandra Hernandez Coronel

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Date:

Thursday, December 5, 2024 2:40 PM

To:

Senate Education Committee

Subject:

NO!!! Do NOT divert public school \$\$\$ to religious or private schools!

[REDACTED]

NO!!! Do NOT divert public school \$\$\$ to religious or private schools!
NO!!! Do NOT divert public school \$\$\$ to religious or private schools!
NO!!! Do NOT divert public school \$\$\$ to religious or private schools!

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 2:58 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposition to Public Funds Diversion to Private Education Entities

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing you to express my opposition to the diversion of public funds to private schools by any method. As a member of an academic institution, I fully support access to public education, in support of choice, elected by South Carolina parents for their children's best interests.

Prior polling of parents has reflected their rejection of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools. The underlying reasons for the rejection of subsidization of private or religious schools through public funds include:

1. Beneficiaries of vouchers and scholarship programs, initiated in other states, were not those impacted by poverty but those already in attendance at private schools;
2. Rural and low-income communities are disproportionately affected as there are few to no private schools within rural communities;
3. The funds as outlined, do not sufficiently cover tuition and/or other expenses, such as transportation and meals;
4. Recipients of public education funds are to be held to the same standards of accountability, including fiscal transparency, admission policies, and anti-discrimination regulations so as to assure equity and access.
5. "Universal choice" through the promotion of privatization of K-12 education will weaken and undermine public education and have significant impacts on the state's budget.

Thank you in advance for your support to oppose the diversion of public funds to private schools. Education is the gateway to America's future by which students can realize their potential as contributing members as part of America's citizenry.

Sincerely,
Julia F. Houston, MSW

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:07 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Education Dollars diverted to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

To the Members of the Senate Education Committee:

I am writing to you today to respectfully request that you not consider any bills in the next legislative session that would allow public education dollars to be used for Private and/or Religious School Education.

The beauty of a public education is that all children are given the same opportunities no matter where in the state they live. Private and Religious schools are not bound by the same rules that Public Schools are and can deny minority students, students with disabilities and others from receiving an education. Additionally, taking money from the public schools will stress an already tight budget for Public Schools. The only way to make Public Schools better is to keep what money we have for them IN them!

I appreciate you taking the time to read my concerns. Thank you for your service.

Sharon Robinson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:11 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposed to it

[REDACTED]

Please register my opposition to this plan to separate fans for schools

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:13 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposition to diverting no public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

SC schools are already weak and failing. We do NOT have the luxury of diluting them further with this appeasement to private schools. Absolutely unacceptable.

Thanks for listening -
Laura Schaible
Charleston SC

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:11 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No public money for private schools

[REDACTED]

Members of the committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to diverting public money to private schools. Public schools follow certain standards for good reasons, not least to provide equal opportunities for learning to all children. Private schools are exempt from the same oversights, and there are no guarantees that the public money used would yield a valuable education. It is in everybody's interest that the state offers as good a general education as possible.

Private schools bleed funds from public schools, and they are unequal in essence. Even in areas where there are choices available to the general public, and there are many areas where they are not, private schools are under no obligation to receive and educate every child, and so can cherry-pick the students they want. As long as the parents who want to choose those schools for their children want to pay for that, that is fine, but that is not how everybody's tax money should be used.

In fact, the South Carolina Constitution prohibits use of public funds for private schools. It should be as simple as that.

Public schools need to be strengthened, not hollowed out. Please vote no.

Sincerely,
Bente Klinge

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:17 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public school funds

[REDACTED]

Please do not divert public school funds to private schools. Public schools need those funds, and more, to keep our public schools vibrant. Public school children deserve a good education and the only way they can get it through proper funding. The diversion of public schools funds to private schools will seriously harm public school children's education.
Thank you
Carol Beckett
Johns Island, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:19 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Let us not forget

[REDACTED]

Let us not forget that many educational agencies, researchers and foundations rank the quality of education delivered in SC from very low to pathetic. Yet, many in our state Legislature still advocate for directing scarce resources to those families that can afford to fund a private education for their children. Please provide to news outlets the evidence the committee is reviewing that demonstrates that educational outcomes for all students will be superior in the long-run should state funds be directed to private schools.

Larry Grooms, my senator, should (and should have held) hold a townhall to share this evidence and listen directly to the voters in his district. Any senator unwilling to hold such a townhall does not want to listen to a cross-section of voters in their districts, in my opinion. Maybe, they only want to listen to private/religious school lobbyists. Share the evidence TODAY. and delay any votes. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,
Tori Cabot
Mount Pleasant

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:23 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: OPPOSITION TO DIVERTING PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Education Subcommittee Members,

As an Upstate South Carolina publicly educated citizen, I am vehemently opposed to diverting public school funds to private schools. Private schools are a parents' choice and should be shouldered by the parents who choose that route. Public schools are for all children of our state and public funds should be restricted to public schools.

Our citizens should not subsidize private or religious institutions. South Carolina should guarantee an excellent education for all students whether well off or low income, and public funds should not be diluted to accommodate private institutions.

Please put the needs of all South Carolina children and the quality of a public education first.

If you have any questions, I am happy to respond.

Sincerely,
Andrea Woodfield
Charleston, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:36 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Oppose diverting public funding to private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to voice my opposition to any diversion of public funds to private schools.

1. Private schools are not readily accessible to students in rural areas and the funds to low income families are often insufficient to allow families to cover tuition and other costs associated with private schools. This means the use if these funds, should they be diverted to public schools, are inequitable, often not helping those families who might most need financial assistance.
2. Public money should require accountability. Public schools have educational standards, but private schools may not use the same standards in some cases, so accountability of public dollars is less readily attainable.
3. I worry that diversion of this funding is detrimental to public education funding and would weaken and undermine public education.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my concerns and request that you seriously consider the risks of diverting any public dollars to private institutions.

Respectfully,

Cynthia Bledsoe

[REDACTED]



WWW.LWVSC.ORG

TO: Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Scholarships

FROM: Dr. Janelle Rivers, Education Advocacy Specialist

SUBJECT: Budget Consequences of Education Scholarship Bills

December 5, 2024

Ballot initiatives in other states have shown that when voters have an opportunity to weigh in at the polls, they defeat proposals that attempt to send public money to private and religious schools. Ninety percent of South Carolina voters choose to send their students to public schools, and it's likely that they, too, would oppose sending public money to private schools.

The over-arching concern is that the General Assembly is constitutionally charged with the "maintenance and support of a system of free public schools open to all children in the State."¹ Any mechanism that directs public money to private and religious schools instead of strengthening options within our system of public schools is unlikely to meet with approval from the majority of voters.

South Carolina lawmakers have been wise to wait to see the results of "universal choice" experiments in other places. States that implemented "universal choice" programs have seen disastrous effects on their state budgets. We can benefit from their experience.

These "universal choice" programs are being promoted nationally by dark-money groups whose ultimate goal is to undermine the public schools in order to privatize K-12 education. The propaganda that these programs are primarily to help students in poverty has been discredited by the widely known fact that such funds most often go to families that are well above the poverty line.

¹ SC State Constitution, Article XI, Section 3.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:46 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public schools

[REDACTED]

I strenuously object to the diversion of public funds to private schools, in any shape or form - no tax credits, no vouchers, no scholarships.

Thank you.

--

Ginger Johnson Sottile
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:47 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds for Public education

[REDACTED]

Allowing public tax dollars to subsidize private schools is about as much an overreach of government as I have ever imagined. There is no justification for it. I personally believe that public education is essential to the quality of life of every person in our community.

Public schools need better funding, more support, a demand for higher excellence, workign conditions that respect teachers and encourage them to stay in teaching. Do that. That is your mandate.

MB Berry
James Island, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:49 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting Public Funds to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

To: SC Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships

I am writing to express my sincere hope that you will refrain from siphoning off further funds from public schools. As a former teacher in Charleston County, I have watched the funding pie for education in South Carolina be continuously subdivided in order to accommodate every parent group wanting a segregated education for their Children. We call it charter schools in South Carolina, but it is another version of publicly funded private schools. Dropping the pretense of equitable funding of public schools by outright funding of private education is unconstitutional. At the very least, it will open our state education department up to lawsuits. That will be another expense that our schools and our teachers and our administrators and our students cannot continue to bear. Parents who want a private education for their children need to be able to pay for it. The public school system in South Carolina has many challenges; Decreased funding will just make it more difficult.

[REDACTED]


Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 3:59 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 Education

[REDACTED]

I am writing to tell you that I strongly urge you not to fund private K-12 education. Tax money should not be used in this way because already our public schools are underfunded. If parents want to send their children to private schools then they should pay for that. Trying to remain positive in a very negative atmosphere.

Sincerely,
Janet Isaac

[REDACTED]



Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 4:03 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: I oppose

... diverting any of our public funds to private schools. I don't care if it's called a voucher or an educational scholarship... If it diverts money from our public schools to private schools, it's a travesty.

Carol Tempel, Ed.D.
CCSD School Board, District 9

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 4:17 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Don't divert public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Education Subcommittee,

I write to voice my opposition to diverting any public funds from our public schools to private schools over which the state exercises minimal oversight. Our public schools are subject to much regulation by the state and are obligated to serve all students, including those requiring accommodation and extra support. Private schools can teach as they see fit and accept only those students they wish to serve. We should not be funding these schools when our public schools and all SC students who attend them need more support, not less. I do not approve of my tax dollars supporting private schools.

Thank you,
Julia Eichelberger

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 4:20 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Don't divert public school funds to private schools

[REDACTED]


As a product of SC public schools, I know how important our public schools are to both educating and socializing our SC citizenry.

I've lived in other places and traveled around the world and know also how comparatively little SC spends here on educating our youth. Taking money from public schools to subsidize private schools is not right. If a parent chooses private education for their child, it is their choice and their sole financial responsibility (I did for my child for part of her education).

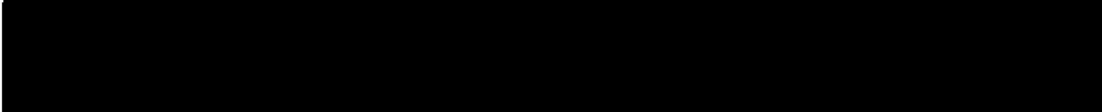
Not only should we leave public education funds alone, we should increase that investment.

David M. Furchgott


[REDACTED]



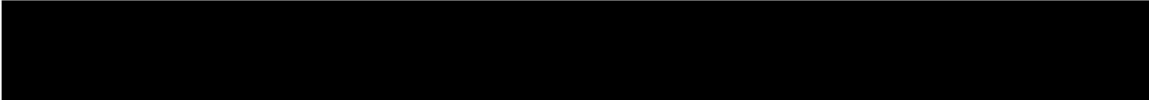
Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 4:54 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting, public money for religious and private schools



As a tax paying citizen of the state of South Carolina, I object to public funds being diverted to religious and/or private schools. Public schools must take all students. Private and/or religious schools are allowed to discriminate. In addition, allowing public funds to go to religious schools, violates the First amendment of the constitution, and would likely not stand up to scrutiny in federal court. Defending such lawsuits would further deplete public funds. Finally, this proposal does nothing to benefit the majority of the citizens of the state, but instead only a few. I urge you to reject this unconstitutional diversion of public funds.



Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 4:55 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Please do not divert funds to private schools



It's bad to divert funds to private schools, and even worse to divert funds to private religious schools. Why should all taxpayers be charged for religious education of the few?
America was founded by the belief that the government should not favor religious groups.
Additionally, people who have used such taxpayer funds for private schools have been among the richer. We do not need to transfer more public money to the richer of certain sectarian beliefs, thereby weakening public schools.
Nancy Moore
Folly Beach

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:04 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diversion of Public School Funds to Private and Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

To: SC Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships

I write today to communicate my strong opposition to the use of any taxpayer funds to fund or support tuition at private or religious schools. The United States and the State of South Carolina are legally bound to offer public education for all students. Should parents choose not to take advantage of public educations and opt to send their children to private schools, that is their choice and one they should bear financial obligation for.

There is much opportunity for improvement in South Carolina public schools. Our rankings are in the bottom 10-15% depending upon the study. If there is truly "excess" funds then please direct it to escalating our poor performing schools from their lowly rank.

My children attended both public and private schools and I most certainly never expected my neighbors and fellow tax payers to fund that luxury.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Ann Edwards
[REDACTED]


[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:10 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Just Say No!


[REDACTED]

We are writing to encourage you to vote NO on the SC Senate Education Subcommittee bill yo allow public taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private/religious schools. The SC Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships meets on December 10 to discuss allowing taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools. The American Association of University Women and [REDACTED] League of Women Voters SC (and AAUW and LWW Charleston Area) oppose any diversion of taxpayer funds to private schools. We believe this is a threat to our state's public education system. Please vote NO!

Rochelle and Thomas Epperson



Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:11 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Funding private tuition



Private school is a choice. Let them pay their own tuition.
We fund public schools. The money should go to public education not private schools.

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:27 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 Education Scholarships - Opposed

[REDACTED]

To Whom It Concern,

I am opposed to diverting public funds to private or religious schools. Historically, these programs have provided assistance to households that can already afford private\religious education even though these programs have been touted as a means to help lower income families. Furthermore, the majority of low income families live in rural areas that are not in close proximity to private and religious schools and the vouchers, to-date, are not sufficient to cover transportation and meals.

Thanks,
Chris Symons

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:37 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: public school funds

[REDACTED]

I am vehemently opposed to diverting public school funds to private or religious schools for any reason.

The Senate is a body of members elected by the public to serve the public. Members should be using their voice and votes to show support only for free and public schools as required by the South Carolina State Constitution.

Sincerely,
Freida F. McDuffie

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:41 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Funding Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Funding private schools with tax money is not the right way to improve South Carolina's poor school systems.

This sidesteps the issue, and is a legislative "cop out".

This is discriminatory, helping wealthier citizens who can afford the balance of private tuition, further hurting those who cannot.

Our legislature should rather focus on improving public school performance via Teacher/administrator quality improvement ... competitive salaries to attract and retain good teachers plus incentives for both teachers and students ... a much better investment of our taxpayer dollars. Quality public education for every child is critical to maintaining a uniformly quality society. Private schools vouchers further our state's educational gaps.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:41 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No tax \$ for private schools !!

[REDACTED]

I'm a 73 year old lifelong resident of Charleston County, a retired teacher, and a parent. DO NOT USE MY TAX DOLLARS TO FUND PRIVATE OR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS!!

Public education is the cornerstone of democracy.

Public education in South Carolina needs every dollar it can get.

And get religion out of our public schools! Have you forgotten this country was founded on the separation of church and state by people fleeing religious persecution???

Jan Merritt

[REDACTED]

TAKE ACTION BY TOMORROW:
DIVERSION OF PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The SC Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships meets on December 10 to discuss allowing taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools. League of Women Voters SC (and LWV Charleston Area) oppose any diversion of taxpayer funds to private schools. We believe this is a threat to our state's public education system.

WE ASK SUPPORTERSk TO SEND AN EMAIL BY TOMORROW, DECEMBER 6, AT NOON TO

seducomm@scsenate.gov

TO VOICE YOUR OWN OPPOSITION TO DIVERTING PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS.
Sent from my iPad

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 5:58 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposed to using public funds for private education

[REDACTED]

I, a state resident, would like to share with you that I am opposed to

DIVERSION OF PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Rachael McNamara
Mt. Pleasant, SC
[Get Outlook for Android](#)

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 6:15 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Commentary on diverting public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

I am writing to let this committee know that this voter is opposed to sending public money to any private or religious school. It's a rip off for taxpayers. Public money needs to go to public schools. Religious and private schools are not answerable the same way public schools are. This effort was recently voted down in the state of Kentucky by 65% of every single county in the state. Those citizens recognized that it would increase the tax burden on every voter. I strongly oppose the State of South Carolina trying to do this.

Regards,

Teresa Thomas
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 6:46 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No Diversion of Taxpayer Dollars to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to register my strong opposition to diverting tax payer funds away from our public schools to subsidize private schools. Our SC public schools have never been fully funded, and it shows in our pitiful state ranking.

Every dollar taken out of public schools further weakens public education, keeps families in poverty, makes our state and communities less competitive, and takes away the right for every child to thrive and reach their full potential.

If parents want to send their children to private schools that is their choice-but taxpayer dollars shouldn't be used to provide handouts and subsidize the wealthy.

Thank you for supporting all of our children by keeping public tax payer dollars in public schools as required by our state Constitution.

ren Byko

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 6:51 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No diversion of taxpayer dollars to private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to register my strong opposition to diverting tax payer funds away from our public schools to subsidize private schools. Our SC public schools have never been fully funded, and it shows in our pitiful state ranking.

Every dollar taken out of public schools further weakens public education, keeps families in poverty, makes our state and communities less competitive, and takes away the right for every child to thrive and reach their full potential.

If parents want to send their children to private schools that is their choice-but taxpayer dollars shouldn't be used to provide handouts and subsidize the wealthy.

Thank you for supporting all of our children by keeping public tax payer dollars in public schools as required by our state Constitution.

Rob Byko
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 6:53 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do not use tax dollars for private schools.

[REDACTED]

I'm 70 years old, and I've been a resident of Charleston County since 1968. I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Licensed Professional Counselor, and the father of three adult children.

Even though I have no children (or grandchildren) in any school in Charleston County, public or private, I will gladly pay my share of taxes to support the public schools. A strong public education system is absolutely essential to the survival of civilized society, and of our democracy.

I STRONGLY PROTEST ANY PLAN TO USE MY TAX DOLLARS TO FUND PRIVATE OR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

Public education in South Carolina needs every dollar it can get. The diversion of tax dollars to private schools, religious or secular, will not enable ordinary people to afford a private school education for their children, but instead will simply subsidize wealthier families in sending their children to private schools.

For the sake of future of the State of South Carolina, I ask that you oppose this proposal.

David Bethany, MEd., LPC, LMFT

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 6:54 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Please don't corrupt our Public Education System

[REDACTED]

The children who are from families who can afford a Private School Education ALREADY ARE IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS!!

For most of us, a Private School Education is out of reach, so I BEG YOU NOT TO STEAL MY CHILDS EDUCATION BY FUNNELING MUCH NEEDED PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING in the form of "Vouchers" to the wealthy. That idea is so anti-Christian, unkind, and just WRONG!!!

Please-look carefully in the mirror and I hope you don't see a person who robs from the middle class and poverty class, to serve the wealthy class. The wealthy few already have all the perks and benefits our education system has to offer!

I implore you to look into your conscience and consider what Jesus would do?

Sincerely and with love for our children,

Diana L. Bunzel

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 6:55 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers/Tax Credits

[REDACTED]

Hello,

Please do NOT support legislation that allows public tax dollars to go to private K-12 school in the form of a voucher or tax credit.

Please DO support public school with extra funding to give ALL students the opportunities and luxuries sought in the private sector. Lower class sizes, increase teacher pay, remove testing (within your ability), incentivize district for providing specialized courses, invest in public school sports, etc.

Public tax dollars should go to public school.

Thank you,
Laura Merk

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:02 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers

[REDACTED]

To members of the South Carolina Senate Education Subcommittee on k-12 scholarships:

I am writing on behalf of our public schools -- which are already under funded. Many of the students attending public school depend entirely on public education and are living in poverty. Still more are from homes affected by generational illiteracy.

I urge you to consider the greater good. Every penny of South Carolina's funds for public education must be devoted to our schools and not siphoned off into vouchers and special projects.

Respectfully,
Melinda Hamilton

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:03 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Thoughts on Vouchers and School Choice

[REDACTED]

Dear Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships,

As we move into a new year, I am writing to ask with the utmost urgency that you stop diverting our tax dollars from public schools and into private, religious, and charter schools.

School Vouchers and Scholarship Programs do just that; they make the playing field for education even more unlevel than it already is, and provide MORE money to schools that have the right to discriminate against students for a wide variety of reasons including academic aptitude, race, sex, gender, and religion. In short: not what the majority of tax payers think they are paying for, in terms of education.

Please continue to do the hard work of ensuring that our education system is designed to **serve all South Carolinians**, and don't complicate the system anymore than it already is. School Vouchers aren't helpful. Charter schools rarely are. School choice, almost never.

Please continue to advocate that **ALL public schools are high quality and well-funded** so that public schooling can function as it was intended.

Warmly, and with gratitude for all you do,

Lindsay Howerton-Hastings
MEd/EdS RYT, NCC, LPC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:18 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Possible School Voucher Legislation

[REDACTED]

SC Senate,

My name is Michele Minor and I live in Rock Hill, SC. I am a community member, and I have concerns about the possible voucher legislation. I think it is vital that we protect funding for our local schools that serve every student. I'm most concerned about access for students from disadvantaged homes, as well as students with disabilities. Private schools can choose who to educate. Only 1.5 to 3% of kids receiving vouchers in other states are students with disabilities. We have also seen a divide between races and socio-economic status, abled and disabled. I have received services in the public school system when I was in school, that I may not have otherwise received. I received speech therapy from the school system as well as therapy for my neurodivergence, which was unusual at the time for a female whose neurodivergence was undiagnosed. I also came from a home where my parents didn't afford to send me to private school even with the voucher program. I was able to receive an excellent education from the public school system that I had grown up in South Carolina. The voucher program will take resources away from the students who need the resources provided and give it to those students who come from wealthy backgrounds. I want all students to be able to have the opportunities and services I had while growing up in Fort Mill, SC. Being in a class with students who came from more advantaged backgrounds provided an incentive for me to do well in school and to continue my education. I want future generations to be able to get a good education from the schools in South Carolina. The voucher program will take money away from the public schools and give them to private schools, which will widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. All students deserve to have an excellent education no matter what socio-economic class or disability they may have.

If vouchers are to be proposed, please consider income caps to ensure that the reach and access extends to students who may have limited access due to undeserved areas and lack of resources. Please also ensure access for all, including students with disabilities. Your constituents are trusting you to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few.

Thank you for all your work in our state.

Sincerely,

Michele Minor

Rock Hill, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:42 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public School Funds

[REDACTED]

I am very opposed to any funds for public schools in Charleston County being diverted to private schools.

Elizabeth McAnally
James Island

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:51 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: taxpayer money for private schools

[REDACTED]

I am writing to register my opposition to diverting taxpayer money to fund private or religious school tuition. While our two children attended private and parochial schools for part of their educations, I believe this private decision should not be publicly funded. If the commitment to keeping the government out of private decisions is real and not a talking point, this is a place to demonstrate that.

Further, funding private education will only undermine our state's public education system, which historically has been underfunded and, as you are well aware, does not compare well to those of other states. May I suggest that we use limited resources to fully fund our public schools rather than ensuring we remain at the bottom of the educational barrel?

Thank you,
Dr. Gary Kunkelman

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:54 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

As a very concerned SC resident I am writing to ask you to never allow the use of public funds to support private schools. Our public schools are already struggling to provide even passable education to our students, who are the future of this state. Keep the funds public and help our students create a better SC.

Thank you, Anne Freeman [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 7:58 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Education Scholarship Trust Fund

[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern;

I am emailing you in support of allowing ETSF funds to be used for private schooling. As a parent and tax-payer, I believe in being able to provide the best education possible. The quality education provided at private and religious schools positively and directly impacts our state by improving the educational outcomes for children. As such, allowing the expanded utilization of these funds to parents will provide an opportunity for our youth to obtain the best education possible, setting them up for future success.

In conclusion, I implore you to approve the use of ETSF for private and religious schools.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Joseph M. Arminger, PharmD, BCPS

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:00 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 education scholarships

[REDACTED]

I am writing to give comment on the private school scholarships. As a resident of Fort Mill, SC and mother of a first grader, I strongly oppose using public tax dollars to fund private schools. Private schools are not held to the same standards as public schools. They are not held accountable to widely recognized standards. Should private schools receive these funds they should be required to follow all the same standards as our public schools.

Private schools are also not required to provide accommodations for all students. This in itself should disqualify private schools from accepting tax payer dollars.

Providing our tax payer dollars to support schools that are not held accountable to the state, seems like a reckless use of my tax dollars.

Please continue to fund and support our amazing public schools and teachers. They are some of the most amazing people out there and deserve so much more than we can give.

Darci LaRoche

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:01 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Please do not use public funds to support private schools

[REDACTED]

Distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee,

As a taxpayer and as a parent, I am adamantly opposed to public money being spent on private and religious schools. As you know, and as the South Carolina Supreme Court has found, our state constitution bars spending public money on private K-12 schools. Please reread Article XI, Section 4:

"Direct aid to religious or other private educational institutions prohibited.

No money shall be paid from public funds nor shall the credit of the State or any of its political subdivisions be used for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution."

The legislature and the state board of education has passed regulation after regulation for our public schools, including budget provisos and book bans, yet the state would give money to schools that do not have to follow the same guidelines. How is that fair?

Please vote against spending taxpayer money on private and religious schools.

With thanks for your support of the future of education in this state,

Rachel Cox

[REDACTED]

From: Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:02 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public for private education

[REDACTED]

I am against public funds to private schools. We need to focus (effectively and with clear/measurable goals) on improving our educational system.

I volunteer in the Reading Partners program and my participation has shown me how effective this "extra little push" can be.

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:07 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds

[REDACTED]

I am totally against using taxpayer money for private education.
Put those funds in the public school system and improve our schools for everyone.
If you want a private education you should pay for it yourself.

Kathleen O'Donald

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Funding for private schools

[REDACTED]

I OPPOSE the use of public funds for private schools.

Private schools should be paid by the parents or scholarships, NOT public school funds.

Marcy S. Walsh

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Thursday, December 5, 2024 8:09 PM
Senate Education Committee
DIVERTING PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

[REDACTED]

To the members of the SC Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships:

In the interests of better education for the students of SC, I ask you *not* to use public monies to fund private schools.

There is a need for this money to remain in the public school domain.

Please note that **92% of all K-12 students in South Carolina attend public schools.**
And the percentage of students achieving math proficiency in South Carolina is only **41%.**
The percentage of students achieving reading proficiency is **52%.**

We need more money in the public schools.

Sincerely,

F. Kite, MS
Charleston, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:03 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Using Public Funds to subsidize private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Senate Education Committee Members,

I oppose diverting public funds to support private or religious schools because doing so will threaten South Carolina public education.

Here are the reasons for my opposition.

1. One of my college research projects was to determine whether vouchers would benefit families without the means to send their children to a private school. The results of my research were clear. Families could not afford the balance of the annual tuition; they could not afford the cost of transportation to the private schools and could not afford the costs of uniforms, meals and other required necessities that vouchers do not cover.
2. Private schools can discriminate against minorities by setting their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. I attended a private high school, and I know first-hand how discriminatory private schools can be.
3. Voters support public schools. A high percentage of parents prefer that their children attend public schools. In fact, when private school funding options have been on the ballot in other states, voters have rejected the idea of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools, i.e. Colorado, Kentucky and Nebraska in November 2024.
4. The South Carolina state constitution dictates that "no money shall be paid from public funds ... for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution."

Public money should be spent to strengthen our public schools. Our tax dollars should support public schools that will attract young college graduates to a career in teaching, to further increase their salary, and to treat our teachers with utmost respect – they are preparing our children for their future careers.

I would appreciate your consideration to abide by the state constitution and do what is right for South Carolina students.

Sincerely,

Carol Asalon

This individual is retired from Furman University. The content of this email does not necessarily represent the views of the University.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:10 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Fw: Vouchers

[REDACTED]

To: sceducomm@scsenate.gov <sceducomm@scsenate.gov>
Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 08:33:03 PM EST
Subject: Vouchers

To members of the Senate Education Committee:

I'd like to voice my opposition to diverting taxpayer funds to vouchers for private and religious schools. We should concentrate on methods to improve the public school system we have along with additional opportunities for students in rural counties and Title I schools.

Joy Campbell

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:30 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds need to stay in public schools

[REDACTED]

Public schools are mandated to take children, especially children with health issues. By diverting public funds, that could be used to help all children, to private institutions, that have no requirement to take children with challenges, we are taking away much-needed resources from those that may have no other means of receiving them.

We need to look at ensuring our public school system is strong and dynamic and fully supported so there is a path to success for every child in our state. To do anything less means there are only certain children (easy) that deserve a high quality education and those that don't fit that category will just get whatever is left, if anything. It is unacceptable that our state believes "minimal adequate" is what our children deserve.

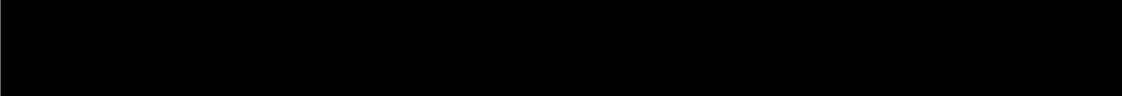
We need to support public education and help it continue to evolve as our world does so we have kids ready for whatever the future holds.

Regards,
Jennifer Mieras

[REDACTED]
Business Consultant & Strategist
Board President | Charleston County School of the Arts MS Band
Board Member & Secretary | North Charleston Pops <https://www.ncpops.com/>



Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:33 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting Public Funds



I strongly object to using taxpayers money for private schools in the state of SC.
Diverting our tax money to fund religious schools is an outcry. This opens the door to reduce accountability for services.

Sincerely
Claire O'Neill
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:18 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public School money

[REDACTED]

Dear committee members,

Public school money should absolutely never be used to pay for private schools, especially religious schools. There is a reason we have the separation of church and state. Both of my children received excellent public school education for elementary school and high school in Mount Pleasant. If you start funneling PUBLIC money to private schools you siphon money away from the kids you are supposed to be funding. It's unconstitutional and you are wasting your time and taxpayer dollars to even reconsider it.

Sincerely,

Pam Hricik

[REDACTED]

nt from AT&T Yahoo Mail on Android

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:27 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No public money to private schools!

[REDACTED]

To Whom it May Concern,

Our public schools deserve full funding, with no public dollars siphoned off to private schools. Studies have consistently shown that the majority of families that use vouchers already were sending their children to private schools. Vouchers rarely cover the cost of tuition, no transportation is provided, and private schools can choose what students to accept. Don't go the route of Mississippi and reinvigorate segregation of our public schools by taking money from them and sending it to private schools that serve the privileged families.

<https://www.propublica.org/article/mississippi-segregation-academies-taxpayer-dollars-1960s>

Sincerely,

Sandra Larson, PhD NREMT

[REDACTED]

sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:32 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: diversion of public funds to private/religious schools

[REDACTED]

I am 100% opposed to diversion of public funds to religious schools. It is a violation of the separation of church and state. In addition, funding of private schools may promote segregation, and not support inclusion. This is a dangerous direction for us, as a democracy, to go.

Thank you,

Sue Parkins Cameron

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:44 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diversion of Taxpayer Funds to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Education Committee,

This letter is being sent to you to express my stance on the issue of taxpayer public funds being diverted to private schools. I consider myself very knowledgeable on this issue since I am a recently retired SC school teacher with 30 years' experience teaching in Title One schools. I am against the public funds being diverted to private schools for three main reasons:

1. Public funds should not be used for religious, private institutions, or homeschooling. This violates the separation of church and state. The state should not be a part in the decision making of religious or private institutions and vice versa. I am an active member of my church, and I do not want the government to have control or persuade my religious decisions and beliefs. This is one of the main beliefs of the founding fathers also.
2. Public funds should not be taken away from public education because our public schools are not receiving the full funding deserved and needed to educate all children in South Carolina. Our public-school teacher salaries are behind the national and regional averages. Private schools and home schools are not required to educate all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, physical and mental ability, or socio-economic status.
3. Lastly, private schools and homeschools do not have the academic and monetary accountability required of public schools. Private schools and homeschools are held to an unfair and lower standard of proving academic progress compared to that required of public schools. They are not mandated to take the same testing of those required of students in public schools. Their testing requirements are not as frequent or challenging as those in public school. If private schools receive public funds, they should be required to take the same tests and the same amount of testing that is required of public-school students.

I am urging you to show support for the hard-working, tax-paying families of South Carolina who want the best education for all children. It is not feasible, and it is not a wise business decision to take public taxpayer funds away from approximately 82% of South Carolina public school children and give it to 18% of those in private school and homeschools. Please . . . Support our children by not taking public school funds to give away to private schools or homeschools.

Jill B. Collins

Jill Collins

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 10:44 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No to diverting taxpayer funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

Hello Committee Members,

As a South Carolina citizen I oppose any taxpayer funds diverted to private schools. Such fund diversions are a major threat to our state's public education system. I do not want state government decisions such as this to destroy our public schools.

Thank you for considering your constituents' viewpoints on this issue.

Sincerely,
Mona Guy Fleming

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 11:01 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diversion of Public Funds to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Please register my opposition to diverting our public funds to private schools.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 11:06 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Oppose Diverting Public Funds to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Members of the SC Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposal to use taxpayer funds to support tuition at private or religious schools.

Diverting public funds to private education poses a significant threat to the integrity and quality of South Carolina's public education system, which serves the vast majority of our students.

Public education is the cornerstone of a thriving democracy and a vital investment in our state's future. Redirecting taxpayer dollars away from public schools undermines their ability to provide equitable and high-quality education to all children, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.

Private schools are not held to the same standards of accountability and inclusivity as public schools. They are not required to accept all students, nor do they consistently provide transparency in the use of public funds. This creates a system of inequality that ultimately disadvantages our most vulnerable populations.

I urge the Subcommittee to reject any measures that would divert public education funds to private or religious schools. Instead, I encourage you to focus on strengthening South Carolina's public schools to ensure every child has access to the education they deserve.

Thank you for considering this critical issue.

Sincerely,
Tricia K. Wright
Spartanburg, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 11:29 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: K-12 "education" scholarships

[REDACTED]

I'm writing to voice my opposition to diverting public funds for private education.

I'm a retired educator, having worked for 28 years in the public school system and an additional 4 in private schools. My children attended both public and parochial schools. I firmly believe that parents have the right to send their children to any type of school. But I am not in favor of taking tax dollars that are intended for public school and sending them to private schools.

Carolyn Gause
Sent from my iPhone



Frances Floresca, Education Policy Analyst and Reporter

December 6, 2024

Gressette Senate Office Building Rm. 308
Senate Education Subcommittee
1101 Pendleton St, Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Chairman Hembree and Members of the Senate Education Subcommittee,

My name is Frances Floresca, and I am an education policy analyst and reporter. I am also **Miss Mission South Carolina USA** with a platform focused on empowering families through education freedom.

As an immigrant to this country from the Philippines, school choice provided my family with the opportunity to give my sister and I the best education for us, and I would not be where I am today without it. Please consider reading my op-ed for the Aiken Standard discussing how the school choice program is legal and does not defund public schools. I have also supported the implementation and continuation of various school choice programs across the nation.

When South Carolina's Supreme Court ruled against the **Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF)** program, it slammed the door on nearly 3,000 low-income families at the start of the school year. Eidson v. South Carolina Department of Education argued that "no money shall be paid from public funds nor shall the credit of the State or any of its political subdivisions be used for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution." This is known as the Blaine Amendment.

There are different types of school choice programs: Vouchers, tax credit programs, and education savings accounts (ESAs). The ESTF is an ESA, which is not a voucher and the funds do not go to religious or private schools. They go to families to help them choose an education that works best for them, and it also allows them to use the funds for other education services including tutoring, extra-curricular activities, and learning materials.

ESA programs are distinct from vouchers and have prevailed against Blaine Amendment challenges. Despite the presence of the Blaine Amendment in the majority of state constitutions, most states have successfully implemented ESA programs.



Frances Floresca, Education Policy Analyst and Reporter

This is also a completely isolated issue from Adams v. McMaster which overturned South Carolina's COVID-recovery SAFE Grants tuition grant program as funds from it would have directly allowed funds to be provided to private educational institutions.

In South Carolina, the ESTF program would have allocated \$6,000 for each student, which is drawn from existing per-pupil funding of \$8,590. This amount represents around 70% of the state's per-pupil allocation, with the remaining funds staying with students in public schools. In the long run it ends up saving the public school system money. This means there will be more money for less students who choose to remain in the public school system.

Students are also required to have attended a public school during the previous school year or be entering kindergarten in order to be eligible for this program, ensuring that the funding is sourced from existing funding in the first place.

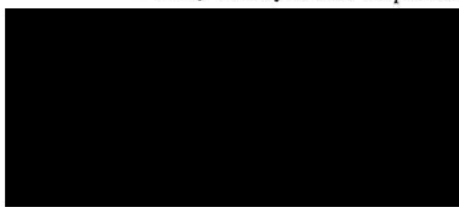
The court's decision eliminates a crucial opportunity for low-income families to access quality education for their children. The ESTF provided financial assistance for educational options that would otherwise be unattainable for these families. While donors have come in to help with the program, the funding will only last until December 31.

Please consider reinstating the Education Scholarship Trust Fund to ensure low-income students in South Carolina will be able to have access to an education that works best for them.

Sincerely,

Frances Floresca

Education Policy Analyst and Reporter



[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 12:24 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: vouchers

[REDACTED]

Dear South Carolina Lawmakers,

My name is Nicole, and I reside in Summerville, SC. As a parent of two young children, ages 3 and 6, I am deeply committed to the success of our public school system. I am writing to express my concerns regarding potential voucher legislation in South Carolina.

Evidence from other states indicates that voucher programs often fail to adequately serve low-income and differently-abled students, thereby widening disparities between affluent and disadvantaged communities, as well as between able-bodied and disabled students.

Moreover, reports indicate that voucher-funded schools frequently do not mirror the diversity of the communities in which they operate. This lack of representation can lead to the exclusion of certain groups from accessing quality education, ultimately weakening the fabric of our society.

It is also important to note that the South Carolina Supreme Court recently struck down a law that allowed public funds to be used for private school tuition, ruling it unconstitutional.

I urge you to consider these factors when deliberating on voucher legislation. Ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to high-quality education is essential for the strength and unity of our state and nation.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Nicole Slaydon

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 4:21 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public School Funds

[REDACTED]

To Whom it May Concern,

Please do not continue on this path to allowing people to control public taxpayer money. It won't take very many kids withdrawing from a public school to make it impossible to fund that school completely. You will have to start laying off teachers after not very long at all.

Please do not do this.

--
Leslie Bracken
HumanKind
Be Both

[REDACTED]

From: Friday, December 6, 2024 6:43 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public money to private schools

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

I am writing to oppose the shifting of public money to private schools in South Carolina. This action will reduce funding for public schools, where our neediest students attend. Private schools are not as accountable as public schools and the money subsidizes those who are wealthy enough in time and money to make this choice. There's little evidence that on the whole, private schools improve outcomes, and often disabled students are left out. We need a strong, effective, accountable public school system in SC, not a scatter-shot approach that harms our existing programs.

Thank you, Amy Ball
Charleston, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:26 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Educational vouchers

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern:

I'd like to express my concern over the potential upcoming school voucher legislation. Public schools and private schools are not held to the same standards not do they have the same accountability. Many students rely on public transportation to get to school, and also rely on free lunches at public schools. Those things are not usually provided at other schools across the state. So while the voucher may give a student school choice, it also increases their susceptibility to increased poverty and hunger.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:27 AM
To: Senate Education Committee

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern:

I'd like to express my concern over the potential upcoming school voucher legislation. Public schools and private schools are not held to the same standards not do they have the same accountability. Many students rely on public transportation to get to school, and also rely on free lunches at public schools. Those things are not usually provided at other schools across the state. So while the voucher may give a student school choice, it also increases their susceptibility to increased poverty and hunger.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:28 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School Funding

[REDACTED]

I oppose the possibility of diverting public funds to private schools. It is an egregious conception. I would like to go on record with my opposition to this threat to the public education system. Thank you.

In Community,
Denise Helton
she/her/hers

[REDACTED]

From: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:35 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: SC voucher legislation

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

I am a parent of two children in the Fort Mill School District and I am against vouchers for private schools. I am especially against ones that would be open to anyone, even wealthy people. I would like to see y'all lift up the school districts that are not doing well and encourage parents to support their local public schools instead. Here in Fort Mill we have huge community support where businesses and parents run fundraisers and supply teachers with materials that I believe has given us an advantage that lower income communities in our state simply can't do. Why not work with the more affluent communities like Fort Mill to replicate this across the state instead of further eroding the current public schools by diverting funds?

Lastly I think it is very sad that you would promote giving vouchers to lower income students knowing good and well they can't make up the financial gap in most tuitions, have no way to get to and from the schools, and can be denied for no reason. There is a lot of data out there showing that states that implement voucher programs are almost exclusively being used by parents that can already afford private school. This is not a good use of tax payer money.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Berens
Fort Mill, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:36 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Testimony for Senate Education Committee meeting 12/10/24

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

School vouchers are basically taxation without representation since local communities are deprived of holding voucher-funded schools accountable through voting. When states choose to fund these vouchers, the result is withholding resources from the most vulnerable children in our communities.

In other states where voucher programs have been implemented, most families utilizing the program never had a child in public school to begin with and most of the recipients were in a higher income bracket exceeding \$100K. In addition, voucher-funded schools don't typically reflect their communities. For example, in NC, it is common for minority students to make up less than 10% of voucher schools in districts comprised of 60% or more minorities.

In summary- vouchers do not mitigate education costs because they are primarily accessed by families who never would choose public education anyway, so it only adds to the cost and ultimately will not present a fair pool of demographics including low income, minority and special needs children.

With South Carolina ranking in the bottom 20% in United States in Education, a bill investing hundreds of millions of tax payers funds into a program that will mostly go to a select few children who are not in need, will be a gross misuse of funds and ultimately will not improve education in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of all children in our state.

Beth Nichols
Richland County, SC

[REDACTED]

From: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:39 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Comments for Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships meeting December 10, 2024

[REDACTED]

Good Day,

I am a resident of Horry County and have family members who teach and attend our public schools. I am a Christian but believe that our public taxpayer dollars should fund public schools, not religious or private schools.

The majority of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools. Most of the funds from educational scholarship and voucher programs go to families whose children are already attending private schools so they are not helping low income families who generally use and prefer public schools.

These religious and private schools already have benefactors to pay for lower income students. This is the way it SHOULD be. Public taxpayer money should NOT be diverted from already under-funded public schools to private and religious schools.

Additionally, I fear that because these private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, there could be discrimination. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my views.

Bonnie E Murray
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 7:59 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposed to Diverting Public School Funds to Private Schools!

[REDACTED]

Would you divert YMCA funds to support a country club? Don't divert public school funds to support higher education private school programs for rich kids! If anything, public schools are underfunded, as it is!

Bill Champion

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:02 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Comments on School Vouchers

[REDACTED]

Many people think the idea of school vouchers sounds like a good idea, but it really is not. It certainly is a way to use public funds to pay for people to go to private schools. Many of the people who can take advantage of these funds in other states already go to private schools. Vouchers are presented as something that will give everyone a choice, but they really don't. In some areas, there is no private school. Parents may lack transportation options. Private schools have a choice about who they accept. What vouchers will do is to take public funds away from public schools who desperately need more money, not less.

Sally McClellan, Ph.D.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:04 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School funding

[REDACTED]

I would like to voice my opposition to diverting public funds to private schools. Thank you.

Dan Kortvelesy

[REDACTED]

"I'm glad I was a teacher" John Wooden

Sent from Samsung tablet

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:26 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: DO NOT SUPPORT Diversion of public funds to private schools

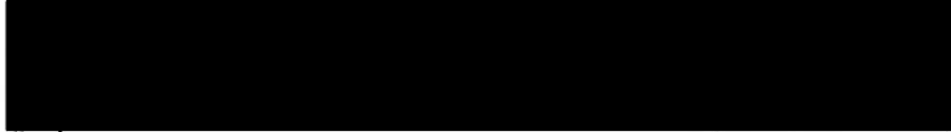
[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern on the SC Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships,


As an highly motivated voter, and active member within my community, I can attest that there is broad discontent and much alarm with this threat to the general public welfare by allowing taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools. I support the American Association of University Women and ~~the~~ League of Women Voters SC (and AAUW and LWV Charleston Area) opposition to any diversion of taxpayer funds to private schools. I agree with their assessment that this bad-faith policy is a threat to our state's public education system.

We voters will not reelect any representative that attempts to dismantle and decimate public education.

Sent from my iPhone



Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:35 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposing Public Funds to Private schools



Do not divert money for public schools to private ones.

Virginia Barredo
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:36 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Writing in opposition to School Voucher Program expansion

[REDACTED]

Good Morning,

My name is Heather Jones and I live in Tega Cay, SC (29708). I am a parent with two students in the Fort Mill School District and I am writing today to express concerns about the possibility of further voucher legislation.

Our public schools are designed to serve all students and the expansion of vouchers will push already strained budgets and undercut the ability of our schools to fulfill this role. Our own district has already had to grapple with the budget implications and we are a very well off area. The access and impact this will have on students in poorer districts and from more disadvantaged homes, especially students with disabilities, is staggering. Private schools can and will reject students with higher needs and our state is already struggling to meet the needs of these members of our community. Instead of funneling funds away to private institutions, our state department of education should be working to address the issues in our system, not further gut it.

I do not say these things from a place of hysterics but one of experience. I previously lived in Texas where there is solid data to show that vouchers simply benefit those already able to afford private options and add massive debt to state budgets - something that is easily confirmed by data from other states that have also already gone the route of vouchers such as Arizona. If nothing else, vouchers are a fiscally irresponsible choice when it comes to stewardship of our state funds and budget.

If vouchers are to be proposed despite all the evidence that they do not benefit students or improve education outcomes, please at the very least consider income caps to ensure that the reach and access extends to students who need them most due to undeserved areas and lack of resources. Please also ensure access for all, including students with disabilities and consider placing requirements on the vouchers that ensure schools receiving them provide students with proper supports. I'd much rather not see vouchers at all, but at the bare minimum they need to be handled with significant regulation and oversight if the committee will not reject them.

One of the primary responsibilities of our elected officials is to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few. I ask that you please truly look at the data and history of vouchers and reject them, instead putting a focus into properly funding and repairing our South Carolina public education system.

Thank you for your work in our state.

Best,
Heather Jones
Parent from Tega Cay, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:39 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers for Private Schools -- Vote No!

[REDACTED]

Dear Legislators,
Vote no on providing vouchers for public schools.
Paula Egelson, Ed.D.
President, League of Women Voters of the Charleston Area

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:46 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Vouchers

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

School vouchers are basically taxation without representation since local communities are deprived of holding voucher-funded schools accountable through voting. When states choose to fund these vouchers, the result is withholding resources from the most vulnerable children in our communities.

In other states where voucher programs have been implemented, most families utilizing the program never had a child in public school to begin with and most of the recipients were in a higher income bracket exceeding \$100K. In addition, voucher-funded schools don't typically reflect their communities. For example, in NC, it is common for minority students to make up less than 10% of voucher schools in districts comprised of 60% or more minorities.

In summary- vouchers do not mitigate education costs because they are primarily accessed by families who never would choose public education anyway, so it only adds to the cost and ultimately will not represent a fair pool of demographics including low income, minority and special needs children.

With South Carolina ranking in the bottom 20% in United States in Education, a bill investing hundreds of millions of tax payers funds into a program that will mostly go to a select few children who are not in need, will be a gross misuse of funds and ultimately will not improve education in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of all children in our state.

Melissa Gilbreth
Richland County, SC
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No to diverting public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

As a resident of South Carolina and a parent, I oppose any diversion of public funds to private and religious schools. Families able to send their children to those private schools obviously are financially capable of supporting those schools. The public schools need more qualified teachers, training, and pay. Having grown up in South Carolina, I have seen the quality and passion of the public school teachers decline. This is very sad and disheartening. More effort needs to be placed on the public schools.
Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:46 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Use of Public Funds for Private and Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

Honorable Members of SC Education Committee:

I desire to express to you my opposition to the use of public monies, by any means, to fund private or religious schools. I am an avid supporter of public schools and am glad to support them with my tax dollars. However, I am adamantly opposed to having my taxes used to fund private or religious schools. Please consider my thoughts when you meet to discuss this topic.

- Voters support public schools. About 90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools.
- Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools. Although these programs were originally promoted as options to help students from poverty, experience in other states has shown that the majority of parents who have benefited from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar programs have not been families from poverty, but rather families who were already sending their students to private schools.
- Educational Scholarship programs and vouchers are not accessible to most families in rural and low-income communities because few private schools serve rural communities and because the funds that have been offered for private school expenses are not sufficient to cover tuition plus other requisite expenses, such as transportation and meals.
- Disbursing public funds requires public accountability. Lawmakers are accountable for responsible use of public money, and any private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools. These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.
- Private schools can discriminate against minorities. Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups.
- Public schools rely heavily on tax funding to operate. Diverting funds to private schools would strain public school budgets, leading to larger class sizes, reduced programs, and other negative impacts on the quality of education.

Sincerely,
Averette
Anderson, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:52 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting taxpayer funding to private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Elected Representatives,

I strongly oppose diverting our tax monies to private schools. Public schools are the only institutions that take every child, even homeless children, and deserve all the funding. I don't want a two-tier education system in our state.

We sent our children to parochial school, because we wanted a Catholic school education for them. We still support a strong public school system, and it happened that they attended public high schools and had good educations. Both are successful tax paying adults now.

Again, I strongly OPPOSE any public funds sent to private schools. That is tax money wasted in my opinion.

Sincerely,
Karen Herbert
Dorence
Votes every election

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 8:53 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Funds for Private and Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the allocation of public funds to private and religious schools. While I recognize the importance of providing diverse educational opportunities, I believe that directing taxpayer dollars toward these institutions raises significant issues regarding equity, accountability, and the separation of church and state.

Public schools are and have always been the cornerstone of our educational system, serving the vast majority of students, regardless of their socioeconomic, religious, or cultural backgrounds. Diverting funds from public schools to private and religious institutions could worsen disparities in educational resources, leaving many students in underfunded schools with fewer opportunities for success.

With consideration for allocating these funds, I ask you to ponder these questions 1) what impacts on the community and the teachers the school employs 2) what accountability measurements will determine and maintain funding 3) who will benefit most from allocating funds to private and religious schools 4) how we distinguish between church and state and 5) special education, special population.

Private and religious schools are not held to the same standards of accountability as public schools in terms of mandated report cards, educational requirements, admissions policies, curriculum, and financial transparency. As a public-school advocate, allocating PUBLIC funds does not serve the public interest but a group of people who still believe in separate but equal.

I urge you to carefully consider the long-term implications of funding private and religious schools. The goal of the education system has always been to strengthen public schools, benefiting all students.

I appreciate your attention to this matter.

Melissa Wright
Concern citizen, parent and educational advocate

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:02 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do not!

[REDACTED]

Please DO NOT divert public money to private schools!
Jenny Rosenthal
Sent from my iPad

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:04 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting Public Funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear subcommittee –

As a SC taxpayer and parent of two, I've watched the push for diverting public funds for years in a number of states. Actually we've been consumers of private and public education in Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina.

We would never have assumed that public funding should help our tuition bill at the private schools we attended. It never crossed our minds, and the dollar amount initially discussed was so low it made it look like a political favor to voters.

Private schools are not accessible or welcoming to many of the families who think this is a way to improve their child's education, and by removing funds slated for public school children of all stripes and abilities, the community suffers. And private schools determine who they will allow, so baiting parents with the idea that a voucher will open the door is incorrect. Public funds should not be used by institutions that discriminate based on race, sex, gender orientation or disability.

Private schools have no public accountability. Teachers are not required to be certified and academic progress measured by standardized tests is not required. Sounds like a take the money and run scheme.

There is still a separation of church and state, regardless of what many seem to believe, and the idea of providing religious schools funding is wrong. Parents who wish to send their children to private or religious schools need to fund the endeavor themselves. We decided private schools were important for our children twice in their education history and we made the finances work. For some it's a sacrifice, for others it is not an obstacle at all.

Please do not allow public funds to weaken our proud public school systems by diverting money elsewhere.

Regards,
Karyn Healey
Cummerville, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:09 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Education vouchers/scholarship programs

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

I am a lifelong resident of South Carolina and have three children in Fort Mill public schools. I am writing you to express my grave concern about the stated goals of the SCGOP and Freedom Caucus to continue to pursue avenues to allow children to attend private schools using taxpayer funds. These types of voucher programs have not only been proven in other states to not be effective in offering equitable educational opportunities for students, they also always cost taxpayers even more money than anticipated.

Private schools are not required to offer the same level of services as public schools and, as such, can turn any student away for any reason. There is nothing to stop them from raising tuition and blocking the neediest of students from being able to afford the difference after any state funded voucher or scholarship. Private schools have no requirement to offer special services to students who need them. This is essentially going to turn into state funded segregation with the students who don't need extra help, money or transportation attending private schools on taxpayer money and the rest will be left to stay in South Carolina's already struggling public schools. This is not a solution that will create a strong future workforce. This is a recipe for disaster.

Private schools are just that, private. They should not be given state money. That is against our constitution, as our State Supreme Court reminded lawmakers just a few months ago. Please follow the constitution and instead of funneling taxpayer money to private schools, work on a solution that would boost the quality and efficacy of ALL public schools in South Carolina.

Thank you,
Katie Rutland
Fort Mill, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:10 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: December 10th agenda item: K-12 Education Scholarships

[REDACTED]

To the members of our SC Senate Education Committee:

As your constituent, please vote against school vouchers and the private governance of public schools. You are convening on December 10th to discuss the K-12 Education Scholarships. Schools should not be privatized nor should vouchers be issued to families who are already taking up 95% of the seats in private schools and affording the tuition on their own. They would drain the state's and our public school funding, allowing room for very few new students to enroll. School vouchers benefit primarily the middle-upper class and those affording the private school tuition on their own. It is a path to make the wealthy wealthier and the poor poorer in a less funded school.

As demonstrated in the Charleston County School District (CCSD), public-private partnership schools have little to no transparency and accountability, raising serious concerns about the schools' governance, policymaking, budget decisions, and student acceptance and retention practices. Public-private partnership school takeovers displace school staff, and, if hired by the private company, educators lose state benefits and rights.

I adamantly oppose school vouchers.

Your constituent,

Jamie Wurdinger

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:12 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Oppose Taxpayer Funds to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

To All SC State Senators:

As a public school teacher for more than 30 years, I strongly oppose taxpayer dollars going to support private schools. I have seen the good that public schools do for the students, the families and the communities that they serve.

The best way to positively impact an entire state is to maintain a strong public school system. By giving public schools what they need to succeed in educating the whole child - academically, socially, and emotionally we uplift the entire functionality of a community, county, and state.

When funding is depleted from the public school system you are damaging an entire population of the future working force of the state. Please take into account that the best educated individuals produce the best workforce for a state to thrive. I urge you to vote against taxpayer dollars going to support private schools.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,
Donna Kortvelesy

[REDACTED]

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

[Redacted]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:23 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Opposition allowing taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools

[Redacted]

Please do not allow taxpayer money to be used for funding tuition at private or religious schools. This violates the separation of church and state clause of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, and is fundamentally unfair to taxpayers supporting public education.

Sincerely,

Hillary Hutchinson

[Redacted]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:24 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Say No to school vouchers

[REDACTED]

To the members of our SC Senate:

I implore you to please vote against school vouchers and private governance of public schools. You are convening on December 10 to discuss the K-12 Education Scholarships. Schools should not be privatized nor should vouchers be issued to families who are already in a position to send their children to private schools. This is only a way to help the wealthy and not a way to help with the education for lower income families or our special needs children. This will in no way help us to have a more educated society. An educated society would be beneficial to everyone. A less educated society for everyone will be detrimental.

I am adamantly against school vouchers for our state!

Your constituent,

Elissa Clifton
Lexington, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:25 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Voucher Legislation

[REDACTED]

SC Senate

My name is Erin Hart, and I live in Fort Mill, SC. I am a parent and community member and am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the impending school voucher legislation. Public schools are already underfunded, and it is imperative we protect funding for our local schools that serve every student. I am concerned about access for students from disadvantaged homes, students with disabilities and for families who want their children to stay out of education. Private schools can pick and choose who they accept and typically limit their acceptance to the wealthiest and whitest applicants. With only 3% of vouchers going to disabled students and XX% to disadvantaged students. **Private schools are continuing to perpetuate racism, classism, and ableism.**

If vouchers are going to be implemented, please consider income caps so they reach the students most in need of resources and support. Include access for all students, including those with disabilities and hold private schools accountable with diversity and inclusion requirements. The previously proposed voucher system was deemed unconstitutional in 2023. Public funds (via my tax dollars) need to stay in public institutions. Any funds being used to create a voucher program should come from a different source than Public School funding.

The children of South Carolina deserve a better educational system than one that ranks 41st in the nation. Proper Public School funding is the only way to do that. Support our teachers, provide them more resources, and encourage sound educational practices implemented in better performing states.

If a voucher expansion is proposed, please reject it in all forms.

Erin Hart, MBA, MS, LAT

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:32 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: Marg Wildermann
Subject: No taxpayer funding of private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Senate Education Subcommittee:

I am a South Carolina resident. My wife and I STRONGLY OPPOSE public funding of private schools. Good public schools are the backbone of American society. Our taxes should ONLY support public schools.

Richard and Margaret Wildermann
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:34 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Private School Vouchers

[REDACTED]

Good morning Senate Education Subcommittee members,

I am a proud graduate of Academic Magnet and I strongly oppose diverting public funds to private schools. I stand with the SC Supreme Court's decision.

Best wishes,
Joshua Alvarado

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:35 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Private school funding

[REDACTED]

Dear Senators,

I believe in the future of our public schools and the need to protect and support them. It's the only way we become a true democracy with an educated electorate.

Please do not divert funds from public schools to private schools. This only serves to further divide the haves from the have nots.

Everyone should be afforded a good education and if our public schools aren't doing that now taking funds away will only serve to further its demise not increase its effectiveness.

Best,

Merrill Towns Chapman

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:39 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Taxpayer money to fund private schools

[REDACTED]

Please don't allow taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private schools. This is just a way for the people that send their children to private school to get a financial break. It doesn't help the children whose parents that can't afford the rest of the tuition or have no way to transport them to and from school. This is just hurting the public school system.

Barbara Bate

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:41 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public school funds

[REDACTED]

Heho,

I am a SC citizen who is proud to support our public schools. Public schools need strong support and equitable funding for every child across the state. I strongly OPPOSE using public monies for private schools. Private schools should be paid for by private entities. Make our public schools strong.

Thank you,
Pamela Ferguson

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:44 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do not Divert !!!!

[REDACTED]

Diverting public funds to support private or religious schools is a threat to South Carolina public education.

Michael Davidson
Elgin, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:49 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: private school funding

[REDACTED]

I am writing to urge the committee to refrain from approving diverting public funds to private or religious schools.

While I am in favor of measures to improve our school system and increase the competency of our students, I do not think giving public funds to private or religious schools is the solution. It is my understanding that in most cases (when this has been done) the money goes to families whose children are already enrolled in private schools rather than to lower-income families it is designed to help.

Thank you,

Kelley Jones Ashcraft

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:50 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: No tax payer money for private schools

[REDACTED]

It is unconstitutional, vote no and save the legal expense.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:53 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do not divert public funds to private schools!

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Senate Education Subcommittee

We write to you as concerned citizens to say that we do not want our taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools.

Doing so would be antithetical to the long-standing American tradition where taxpayers fund strong PUBLIC schools open to all.

Those who choose private school have always done so at their own expense and that is how it should stay.

Another important tradition in America is the separation between Church and State. Our government is non-sectarian and should not get involved in religious matters which are a private affair. Again, those who wish to utilize religious schooling may do so, but it must be at their own expense.

We do not wish for private or religious school education to come out of our pockets.

We believe that diverting our taxpayer money to either is a threat to our state's public education system.

Sincerely

Bob & Mariellen Perugini
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:54 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Senate Education Subcommittee December 10 Meeting

[REDACTED]

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express my opposition to Educational Savings Accounts. Private schools lack the level of accountability that public schools do and they don't have to include and accept all students (as a former special education teacher, this really upsets me). ESAs disenfranchise poor and rural students and families and ESAs are in violation of our state's Constitution. I firmly believe that public funds belong in public schools. I hope you consider my viewpoints about ESAs. Please also consider all of South Carolina's students and defending public education as a bedrock of our democracy in this upcoming legislative session.

Thank you,
Kathryn Brookins

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 9:55 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: It is Wrong to use Public Funds to Pay for Private/ Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

To: Members of the SC Senate Education Committee

From: Becky Godbey, Mauldin SC

Subject: Funding for Private and Religious School is Wrong for SC Taxpayers

Date: December 6, 2024

I am writing to request that you do not pass any type of legislation which uses SC taxpayers' dollars to fund private and/or religious schools.

My experience with private and religious schools is that they are selective of whom they want to accept while public schools are to serve all individuals. Allowing a school to discriminate significantly increases the chances for poorer students, disable students and minorities from being admitted.

Funding the private/ religious schools is providing a stipend to most families that already have the financial means to pay for a non-public school. Children living in rural or low-income areas do not have many options for non- public schools. This sets up a situation of not being fair to all SC students. If there are private/religious schools available – the proposed vouchers or scholarship funds would not be sufficient to cover the non-public school's costs – again discriminating against this group.

Also, the private and/or religious schools do not have to meet the same standards of public education. If they are to receive funding, then they MUST also be held to the standards of public education. It is extremely important that all education institutions who are taking public funds be on equal playing grounds. These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public-school students. You are accountable for the responsible use of public funds.

Having vouchers/scholarships will not improve SC students' education but will drastically impact the SC Public Education System.

Please do not support using public funds for private/ religious schools.

Sincerely,

Becky Godbey [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 10:05 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting Public School Finds

[REDACTED]

All,
As a taxpayer, I feel our funds should be utilized for public school education. If it's the decision of parents to send their kids to private schools then they should provide their own funds or stay in public schools and make these better for all students.

Evelyn White
Concerned Taxpayer

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

From: Friday, December 6, 2024 10:18 AM
To: sceducomm@scsenate.gov; Senate Education Committee
Subject: Against School Vouchers

[REDACTED]

I'm writing to express my opposition to diverting public funds to support private or religious schools.

Voters support public schools. About 90% of SC parents prefer to send their children to public schools. When private funding options have been on the ballot in other states, voters have rejected the idea of spending public money to subsidize private or religious schools.

Vouchers are unnecessary. Most funding for vouchers in other states goes to families whose children already attend private schools--not to families in poverty whom these programs were originally promoted to help.

Vouchers are not accessible to rural and low-income communities. Few private schools serve rural communities and the funds that have been offered in other states do not sufficiently cover tuition plus other requisite expenses like transportation and meals.

Private schools can discriminate against minorities. Private schools can set their own admission policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.

Offering "universal choice" risks serious budgetary consequences. A variety of dark-money groups that promote privatization of K-12 education for profit seek to weaken and undermine public education. When other states have offered private school options to all parents, the impact on state budget funding has been substantial.

Thank you for your time,
Lark Wells

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 10:22 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: funding private schools

[REDACTED]

I strongly object to using taxpayer money to help fund private schools. I pay taxes to support local public schools, which have elected boards of supervision. We, the public, have no control over private schools.

Sincerely,
Dorothy Wilson



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN ACADEMY

1953

December 6, 2024

The Honorable Mr. Hembree
Post Office Box 142
Columbia, SC 29202-0142

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Dr. Rob Brown, and I serve as the Head of School at First Presbyterian Academy (FPA) in Greenville, South Carolina. FPA is a vibrant school serving over 600 students from preschool through Grade 12. We are dedicated to providing an exceptional Christian education that prepares students not only for college but also for meaningful lives and careers.

I firmly believe that the primary responsibility for a child's education rests with the parents. Schools, whether public or private, exist to partner with families in fostering well-rounded individuals who are prepared for service in their careers, communities, and families. Parents should have the ability to choose the educational setting that best nurtures their child's unique strengths and talents, including the option of private schools.


The Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) Program was a pivotal step in advancing school choice in South Carolina. It provided essential opportunities for families who previously lacked access to diverse educational options. By enabling schools like ours to serve more students, the program fosters greater educational innovation, as both public and private institutions must continually improve to meet the growing demand from families now empowered with the choices they deserve.

The abrupt termination of this program was not only a violation of these families' rights but also had serious consequences for schools like ours, which had already made commitments based on the availability of this funding. In response, we were willing to absorb the financial burden in our already tight budget, rather than asking families to leave due to their inability to afford tuition.

While other states around us have expanded school choice funding, South Carolina has unfortunately fallen behind. It is time for us to lead in this area. I strongly urge the subcommittee to reinstate and expand the ESTF Program to make it accessible to more families across our state. All children deserve to learn in an environment that fosters their growth, and all parents should have the freedom to choose the best educational path for their children.

I respectfully encourage you to act swiftly in restoring and expanding the ESTF Program for the benefit of students and families in South Carolina.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rob" and last name "Brown" clearly distinguishable.

Rob Brown, Ph.D.
Head of School

[REDACTED]

ent: Friday, December 6, 2024 10:40 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Subcommittee meeting on Dec 10 re: public monies to private schools

[REDACTED]

I am very opposed to allocating public funds for private education. I am not opposed to private schools – I sent my own daughter to a private school for three years. Private schools do not have the same requirements for accountability in educational standards or financial transparency that are required for public schools. Furthermore, few families in rural and low-income communities across the state have access to private schools, so I am concerned that these funds wind up advantaging families who are already sending their children to private schools. Please spend your efforts on building up public education and allow those who want to give their children a private school experience to do so on their own, WITHOUT public funding.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns.
Janie Shipley

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: I am opposed to diverting public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

Linda Spell Ashley



December 6, 2024

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Palmetto Promise Institute worked during the ESTF program application window, January 15 – March 15, 2024, to promote the program and encourage families to apply, walking them through the process if they needed help. Through this interaction, we developed close relationships with many of the families who ended up using the Education Scholarship Trust Fund program for the 2024-25 school year.

When the SC Supreme Court decision came down September 11, 2024, we were the first place that families turned for advice, and we used this position to collect written testimonials from real parents using the ESTF program who were impacted by the Court's unexpected decision that ripped their scholarships away just weeks into the school year.

Below, please find a collection of written testimonials from ESTF parents who have allowed us to share their stories with you. They are shared with you exactly as we received them, with no edits except those removing personally identifiable information for those who wished to remain anonymous. Additionally, any bolding was done by our staff and not by the authors.

We hope that these stories give you a picture of the real, human impact that the SC Supreme Court's decision has had and the havoc it has created for thousands of families across the state.

We also hope that these letters will show the diversity of reasons why a family may choose to utilize school choice programs like ESTF and the need for the program to survive and be expanded. Education should not be one size fits all; every child's story and learning needs are unique.

Sincerely,

Palmetto Promise Institute

Dear Decision-Makers,

I am writing to let you know my deep disappointment and concern regarding the recent Supreme Court decision to cancel the South Carolina ESTF program. This decision has significantly and immediately impacted countless students, including my son, whose educational journey now hangs in the balance.

As a recipient of the South Carolina ESTF program, I can personally attest to the life-changing impact of this scholarship. It has been a crucial lifeline for our family, allowing my son to thrive at Sumter Christian School. This financial assistance has not only eased our financial burdens. Still, it has also empowered us to focus on nurturing his academic and extracurricular pursuits without the constant worry of financial strain.

The abrupt cancellation of this scholarship has placed me in a precarious situation, and I know we are not alone. Many families are now grappling with the harsh reality of finding alternative funding or, worse yet, facing the painful possibility of having to withdraw their children from schools that foster their potential. This is not merely a personal plight; it is a crisis affecting numerous students who rely on this program to pursue their dreams.

I urge you to recognize the far-reaching implications of this ruling. It is essential to explore pathways that can reinstate support for students like my son. The South Carolina ESTF program was not just a financial tool; it was a beacon of hope for families striving for better educational opportunities for their children. Its cancellation threatens to erode the progress made in providing equitable access to education for disenfranchised communities.

We all share the responsibility to ensure that no child is denied the chance to succeed due to circumstances beyond their control. I implore you to consider the urgent need for solutions that will enable students to continue their education uninterrupted. Let us work together to restore this vital support system that has empowered so many.

Thank you for your attention and commitment to our children's futures.

Sincerely,

 Sumter, SC



Mother of the recipient

On behalf of the decision that was made to no longer provide funding for public school tuition, I was highly disappointed. My plan was for my daughter to attend a Christian public school that

educates students in a smaller capacity than public school. I also felt like it would be safer for my child. I know that if I was financially capable that would have been my route from the beginning.

However, the decision to not offer the funds at the last minute was very unexpected and unacceptable. For those of us who still had to finance things outside of what the scholarship would not have covered, it now has made the financial situation for parents even more difficult including owing debt from things that would have been covered and no longer is due to inadequate funding.

I believe that students should at least be able to use the \$6000 for its initial purposes and once that ends don't offer and additional funding, being that we were initially offered the services in hopes of receiving them and now we have to make last minute discussions to come up with alternative plans.

I am writing this letter to show my deep concern over the recent court ruling that restricts the ability to use the ESTF to pay for private school tuition.

My children have had numerous negative experiences in the public school system in Sumter County. Huge class sizes, different teachers everyday, major behavior and disciplinary issues, bullying, the list goes on and on. We applied and were denied 3 years in a row to get them into an out of zone school. We also applied for Liberty Charter School and were denied due to them not having the appropriate grades available. At one point, they were even going to change the school zones which would have put us in a better school but that was overturned. Private school was not our first choice. It was a last resort.

I could go into all of the horrible experiences we've had but that won't help anything here. My point is just to show that I did not frivolously decide to put my children in private school. This program was in fact very much a blessing to me as a single mom and has greatly benefited my children who come from a single income family.

Since being at Laurence Manning Academy, my children have thrived. They've been loved and accepted in a learning environment that supports growth and achievement. We don't need this grant for tutoring or any other expenses. We only need it to fund their school tuition.

With the new court ruling, we will have to disrupt their school year that has already started. They will have to be pulled out of their new school and be put back in their old school where they were not accepted, where they did not thrive and where they were bullied to the point of never wanting to go back. I cannot even fathom the thought of having to put my kids back in that horrible environment. This will be absolutely detrimental to their education and livelihood.

My hope and prayer is that the court will reconsider their decision for the sake of the many children that have already started the school year in a new school. This is going to cause major disruptions for many families and have devastating consequences on the children affected.

The court had PLENTY of time to appeal this decision but yet waited until after the school year had started. Unconstitutional or not, they had ample time to decide that prior to the start of the school year. **We cannot allow all of these children to suffer because of failures of the court system and the failures of the education system as a whole.**

A mother from Manning

I am a parent of 4 children: a 10 years old son (5th grader), a 7 years old girl (2nd grader), a 5 years old girl (K5 grader), and a 1 year old baby.

When we first heard about the ESTF program over the last winter, we cautiously applied and prayerfully waited for the response. Fifteen days later, we got not only 1 approval letter, but 3 approval letters from SC Department of Education to grant the ESTF scholarships to our children. We falled down to our knees, cried, and thanked God for the gifts from heaven that with our tight budget we would never imagine that we would pick the school of our choice.

Then over the Spring, after the long discussion and consideration we decided to pick Prince of Peace Catholic School as our new school. Everyone is excited. We then said goodbye to our old school which we loved but we wanted to have a better chance for our children. Over the Summer, with the small budget we were preparing for the new school from purchasing new uniforms, new shoes, etc.

When the school started in just a few weeks over the Fall, I could see the difference from my kids at this new school. First, the kids shared with us how they learned about God who created them which they never heard of at the old school. They also learned about being organized and disciplined. The kids started making new friends. From the parent standpoint, I saw that the kids were having more homeworks than the old school.

Then it came to the September 11 decision, when the whole nation was mourning for the loss of victims of September 11, I was doubled-sadness with the State Supreme Court decision over the ESTF program. I was really devastated and panicked. I could not sleep that night. At first, I did not share the news with my wife and the kids because I did not want to see them cry. However, when I knew that I could not keep the news away from my wife, I broke the news. She was so upset and anxious.

As immigrants from Vietnam 30 years ago, we came to the US with the belief that this county is the land of opportunities. Indeed, it was. When we received the ESTF

scholarships from the state, the belief again was doubled down. We thank the US for taking care of its tiny, poor, and unheard citizens.

Now with the State Supreme Court decision, we are living in a limbo. I do not know if I have to withdraw the children from the school or not. They just made new friends and just built a bond with their new friends. It is so heart-broken to take them out of the new school. The school they used to attend is the magnet school, so the children cannot go back to their old school.

We are completely devastated right now! We are praying for a miracle to happen.

A father from Taylors

My son, [REDACTED], was attending a Title 1 school in Charleston county, and it still is one of the better schools in North Charleston. The problem was that he wasn't learning. He entered 1st grade at the top of his class, and he stayed there at the top of his class. His MAP scores and STEP levels barely budged all year. The teacher was too busy trying to bring the rest of the class up to his level from two or three STEP levels below grade level. Our son grew in character that year, as he learned how to sit still and behave while the rest of the classroom was in chaos, but we want him to associate school with academic education. If that learning experience can be enjoyable, even better. That's why we originally applied for the ESTF scholarship. When [REDACTED] was awarded the scholarship, we found out that it could be used for tuition at a private school and so we enrolled him at Charleston Bilingual Academy. Since he was already a grade level ahead of everyone else, we figured he could afford to relearn everything in Spanish. We wouldn't have been able to afford the \$8,000 annual tuition without the scholarship, and we would have never enrolled him at the school if we thought that the scholarship could be taken away after only one payment. We are looking at alternative scholarships, but most of those you have to apply for before the start of the school year. Our son is doing so well at learning Spanish and getting to know his new friends, but it will be very difficult for us to keep him at the school if the remainder of this year's scholarship funds cannot be distributed and used for tuition. If it's possible to appeal the decision or petition for an effective date after this school year is over, **please do whatever you can so that my son won't have to change schools again. Twice in one year is too much to ask!**

A mother from Charleston County

I am working as a Postdoctoral Scholar at MUSC and I am a single Mom. Living with my 6-years old son.

As an ADHD's student is hard to find the right environment to integrate, communicate and learn.

My son was attending a public-school last year when he was diagnostic as an ADHD and hyperactive kid.

He faced a lot of rejection and ignorance from the first month to the end of the school year. I talked with the teacher and the principal to work with them and find a compromise that he can learn and be successful in his study, but nothing happens in the right direction.

He suffered a lot, and he was always working hard on himself. He was thinking that he is a bad kid and could not follow the direction, concentrate and doing his activities at time.

He doesn't want to go to the school, crying every morning and not happy at all. He was isolated from the group, working alone and even taking snacks alone.

I tried at home to follow the doctor's instruction and do what I can do to help him to gain confidence in himself because is not his fault that he is an ADHD.

I was working hard on his hyperactivity and his concentration at home, but I could not make this happen alone by myself without the help of the school.

I talked with his doctor, and she sent the instructions to his teacher because we need to work together to attenuate his symptoms.

The doctor also told me that two many kids (27 kids per classroom) is too much distractive for him and he should start the therapy sessions.

Till now, I could not start the therapy because is too expensive for me on the top of the rent, aftercare, bills, groceries, gas, internet, etc.

I applied for this scholarship to help me to put my son in a good environment between good hands that can guide him and teach him step by step.

This private school is known to have a good education and knows how to deal with his case because they have similar cases.

Also, this school accepts catholic and non-Catholic students and treat them equally. Small group of kids by classroom (8 kids in total).

This school made already a discount for me as a single Mom to help my son can attend the school because even with the scholarship, I am not able to pay the remain amount.

My son is now happy, learning, have a good relationship with peers, staff, and teachers. Ready to go every day to the school.

What is going to happen if I will tell him that you are going to return to your old school or find another school (same district) because I cannot anymore pay the school's tuition. You must be

ready to face what you faced last year. Not only rejection because you are an ADHD but also because your race.

This school not only helping my son but also me. As a single Mom, I must pick up from and drop off to the school for full or even half day. This school is close to my work, and I can arrange myself to pick him up and return working. Also, if I am late, they understand my situation and never complain.

By keeping this decision, we will destroy the right of a kid with a special need to have a good education and grow in a good environment.

The decision is yours.

A mother from Charleston

I am writing to voice my concern about my children, one of whom is a kindergartener. We were strung along to believe we would be able to send our 3 children to a parochial school; they each received \$6,000 for tuition.

We do not have funds available at Calvary Christian school and certainly not in our bank account either. So the children will be out of school in about 2 weeks; nowhere to go.

This places a tremendous hardship on our family. We now have 3 small children with no possibility for education starting 2 weeks from now. I supposed homeschooling may be our only option? I don't even know the legal process for that. Also, the \$6,000. It cannot be used for tuition, but what type of services may I use it for? Music lessons? Tutoring for Spanish? Can I pay for extracurricular activities with scholarship funds?

As a licensed teacher myself, I believe school choice should be an affordable option for all families. Not only those who are living in poverty, but also for those whom have elected another school as the best fit for their children. State dollars should be paid to the BEST schools, to improve the SC school system, overall. Parents should have the right to choose where their children will be educated and the allotted tax dollars should be sent to the schools that earn it.

Please consider my situation and opinions regarding this topic. Afterall, I have 6 children in my household who will be educated in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. As their parent, I believe my opinions about their education should be held with value.

A mother from Myrtle Beach

The ESTF scholarship was the only way I could afford to give my son a better education. I am a single mother and my son was diagnosed with autism when he was 3. He has been attending special education classes in public school up until this year and to be honest I did not feel like he was getting the education that he deserved. My son loves his new school and I would not get to see the smile on his face everyday when I pick him up if it was not for the ESTF Scholarship. He is attending Immaculate Conception Private school for Special Needs Children and I have seen great improvement in him in just the one month that he has been attending. Applying for the Scholarship was the absolute best decision I feel I could have made for my sons education and overall well being. The Yearly tuition for his Specialized education plan is 20,000 dollars and Being a working single mother I would not be able to afford it without the help of the Scholarship.

This testimonial was written before the Sept. 11 court decision:

The ESTF scholarship means a more structured and focused style of learning for my family. This scholarship has provided more flexible options for my children to learn. I know this was a good decision because the process was easy, fast, and informative. I have never questioned what the scholarship, and I have never questioned my decision to move forward with submitting my applications. Thank you for the joy you have brought to myself and my children.

This testimonial was written before the Sept. 11 court decision:

I had no idea about the ESTF scholarship. Since my oldest son was 5 I always wished to send him to Orangeburg Preparatory school. Of course once I had a job to make enough to pay for him to go. Things did not go as planned and I could not afford to send my children to go at the moment until the school administration called me and told me about this scholarship. I was so grateful and thankful that my prayers were answered. I know I made the right decision just for the sake of my children education and the relief to know that they have the opportunity to attend a charter school Like Orangeburg Prep. Every step of the way The school and the SC education program made sure I was aware of everything during the process. I couldn't have asked for another blessing. I am still shocked to this day I recommend this program to many of my friends and family to try. I will be applying again for next year if it's in god plan. Thank you for the opportunity for me and my kids and the blessings you have blessed us with.

A mother in Orangeburg

As a single parent, the ESTF scholarship means my daughter is able to get a quality education close to my place of employment. I live in Lexington but work in Columbia. I wanted to have my daughter closer to me so that if anything ever happened, I wouldn't have to drive 30 minutes to get to her. St. Martin De Porres offers affordable tuition, and the ESTF scholarship covers the majority of the cost, significantly reducing my out-of-pocket costs. The functionality of ClassWallet just makes receiving the ESTF scholarship even better.

I hope and pray my story as well as others across SC help you understand the tremendous losses that will be endured if we are rejected for this help we were already approved for is terminated.

The ESTF program has given my 13-year-old son a peaceful and spiritual journey as he learns academically, thus making his learning experience less stressful. If it had not been for the ESTF program I would not be able to afford for my son to attend a school of such high quality with genuine loving care for him as he. These funds provide for a less stressful school year knowing my child is safe and loved while he is getting a wonderful education.

My son has opened up to be able to speak in front of crowds he once shied away from, he now enjoys learning, he is able to use what he learns to come home and teach his family things. He enjoys going to school because he is in a smaller community that allows his style of learning to be explored without being picked on. My child feels good about what he learns and it shows when applied in his everyday life. If I have to send him back to public schools, I know he will go back into a shell and not grasp his education as he should.

I respectfully ask you to please allow the ESTF program to fund my son as well as others across the state to continue getting a quality education in a caring and spiritual environment.

From a mother in Hartsville

I have been frustrated with the education my daughter has received from public school. She would come home everyday crying, she would cry in the mornings before school because there was over 25 children in her class. The teacher would get so frustrated with trying to handle the children with behavior issues until she would pull my daughter to show some of the other children the lesson. My daughter was stagnant in her learning because her teacher was over worked and the classrooms were packed.

My husband and I both have to work full time to provide for our family and can not afford to stay at home.

when Governor McMaster signed the approval for estf program this gave us hope. This is our first year using the ESTF Program. We found a good private school for our daughter and she is

so happy now. She has learned life skills, her reading has improved. She is excited about school again.

The new change from the supreme court is devastating because we can't afford to cover the tuition at the private school and we can't afford to suffer the hurtful blow to our 10 year old by sending her back to public school.

Even though, my husband and I both have great careers with a college degree and several certifications.

Please reconsider your decision, Children are suffering in these over crowded public schools.

I am one of the parents who was thankful for this ESTF but was shocked upon the sudden termination of it in the middle of the school year!!

My daughter attended a public school since K5 to 5th grade, last year. She has issues with her grades incomplete and low grades. She also had issue with one of her classmates last year making fun or not being good to her bullying her. sometimes would go home crying she even talk to the counselor in the school but nothing good happened. So I was wanting to transfer her to private Christian school but soo expensive until this ESTF gave us the light to pursue that plan.

Now after enrolling her, suddenly somebody just decided to terminate it! I don't want to transfer her back to public school because she just started to get used to it plus her grades went up already, I was so grateful for the great transformation. I don't know where to get the funds right now it's really stressing me up. I have alot of loans,mortgage and bills to pay.

Each student is given a fund for school and it should be the parents decision to where they will enroll their student not whoever that just think of themselves!!

We're paying our taxes. We're not burden to the government!!

I hope and pray we can get this ESTF back.

My children have never been able to flourish in a public school setting. None of them have been able to make good friends due to the horrific public school system in orangeburg, SC. They have all had issues with having to "hold it" most of the day with my youngest even being forced to wet herself multiple times at her former school.


The teachers at the public schools that my children have had to attend do not care about the children, they just teach the bare minimum and push these children through. My kids have said several times that they have learned more at home or out and about than they do at these public schools. My kids have had their things tossed accross classrooms by teachers/administration,

they've been bullied by other students, they've been forced into physical altercations and even picked on by the school staff. I do not agree with my children having to go back through those things. They are thriving now at their new private Christian school than they ever have before. They all love their teachers, they love all of the staff, the principal, the sports coach, and the pastor. They've all been able to make a tremendous amount of friends and are excelling at an incredible rate. I pray that the court changed their stance on the situation and allows my children to be backed by the funding necessary to keep them at this school. **It should be about the children and what they need!**

A mother from Orangeburg

I have 3 children total and 2 of them are deaf and wear cochlear implants to hear SOME. We tried public school for a while which was not a great fit as the class sizes were just too large and loud for them to hear and function and learn well. They are too advanced at this point for the school for the deaf and blind curriculum so our only option is homeschool or private. We looked forward to the idea of our kiddos having an inclusive lifestyle in their private school with small class sizes but that won't be a possibility without the assistance from these funds. Our kids are also not eligible for social security disability even though they are deaf because with the Cochlear Implants they aren't considered disabled anymore. **We don't receive help from anywhere and this was our one break.** Our family is devastated. I personally should have done more research before accepting the funds and had no idea this case was even going before the supreme Court. **Our family made a lot of sacrifices to start the school year where we did and now we are faced with an extremely difficult decision and our children will suffer greatly for the miscommunication.** I wish I received as many emails before this happened as I am now because this is something I believe the families should have been made aware of ahead of time so we could have made a backup plan ahead of time. With that being said, it was a true blessing to have received the help that we did and we are thankful for every penny received. We will continue praying and hope for the best. Thanks for letting us share our story.

The supreme Court ruling for the education fund has completely uprooted our house. It has always been my dream for my grandson to be able to attend oakwood Christian School and finally that dream was realized. My grandson is so happy with his school. He finally has the support that he has always long for. He's never had a father in his life and the men there at the school are such an influence on him. He loves his teachers he loves his Bible class and he has made lots of new friends. And now all of that is about to be ripped away from him and I don't have the hearts to tell him. How dare you people give us this blessing and then strip it away. You

could have at least let us finished out the school year. Please reconsider your decision you don't know how this is going to impact my  if he has to stop going to the school.

A grandmother from Anderson

When I first heard this scholarship advertised on the radio last winter, it was at just the right time. When I looked into it, I was filled with a lot of hope and a sense of possibility. I'd been doing lots of research, but felt very lost about what to do for my oldest son's Kindergarten placement. He's a bright and sociable kid, but was dealing with a lot of anxiety as well as visual challenges. It wasn't my desire for him to be in a public school classroom, as I felt it would be too overwhelming for him and hinder his ability to learn. I say this in spite of teaching public school students the 12 years prior to becoming a mother, and having a love for the classroom and the students I taught.

This testimonial was written before the Sept. 11 court decision:

I've never had the funds to give my kids a better opportunity with their education... my oldest was experiencing bullying and just a bad environment in public school in general.. if it wernt for this grant I wouldn't have been able to get him out of that toxic environment.. this grant has change his life.. **FOR THE BETTER.. this was one of the best decisions I've ever made for my son.. THANK YOU for giving low income families the opportunity to put their kids in a better school...**

This testimonial was written before the Sept. 11 court decision:

The ESTF scholarship means a lotto my family, in terms of I know my daughter can attend a great school. Knowing it wouldn't hurt us financially, so far I think it's been a great decision I'm seeing changes in my daughter (that she's being more involved in school) she's starting to feel comfortable. Honestly it's best decision I could have made for her. without the ESTF scholarship I would not be able to afford her school.

My son had participated in a homeschool co-op the fall prior, but it was apparent he needed something more structured, as his attention and behavior were suffering. However, due to our family's financial situation, we didn't think a private school would work. My husband had dealt with health challenges the last several years which disabled him from working. This put a big financial strain on our family. An opening became available in a local preschool program I knew

of, and we were able to enroll my oldest child. We had to work through his separation anxiety, but within a week, he was very comfortable and really thrived! With a very small teacher to student ratio, it was perfect for him. It was a stretch for us financially, but we managed with some help from family and friends to send him two days a week during the spring. He was truly at home in that setting, and this was a major bright spot for us in the midst of our difficulties. His teachers adored him! And he made new friends and enjoyed learning new things. This major milestone for him was something that positively impacted our whole family.

We were so pleased when his school announced their intentions to open up a 5K program for the fall! The pieces just seemed to fall into place. But it ended up being a very long three month waiting period over the summer before his school was approved as an ESTF service provider. There were some bumps along the way, but eventually they were accepted, just before the start of the school year. We were thrilled! My son had a fantastic beginning to his school year. At the end of just his first week, however, is when we got the news that the scholarship would be abruptly ended as far as school tuition payments are concerned.

We had not even submitted the first month's tuition payment yet, being that his school had a later start than some. So we were left scrambling about what to do. Thankfully, a relative of ours kindly offered to help with payments the remainder of this semester. But this is a major sacrifice for this person, who is single and lives off of social security. **It's incredibly disheartening when you expect the funds to be provided for your child's entire school tuition, only to find out that you have to now somehow come up with that on your own. Especially when you have other life stressors weighing heavily on you.**

The one silver lining for us through this obstacle is that we can still use these funds towards my child's vision therapy program, which he is in great need of, and we plan to begin soon. In fact, the provision of vision therapy as an approved ESTF expense is absolutely incredible! Scholarships for that kind of thing are almost nonexistent and this is something that insurance does not cover. A big "thank you" is owed to whomever motioned to include vision therapy! However, to be able to benefit from this, you obviously have to enroll your child in an independent school, which is a big expense. So beyond this year, should my child need continued vision therapy, I do not know how we would fund that if the ESTF will no longer be available for private school tuition as well.

Thank you for taking the time to hear from us as a family impacted by the ESTF State Supreme Court decision.

As an educator I know that my children's education is very important. While education is important, building relationships with their peers is also important as well. I decided that my children needed an educational environment that not only focused on education but in building positive relationships that will help them become aspiring adults. LOL Steam School of the Arts provides a loving and caring environment with a smaller teacher to student ratio, which gives the teachers time to really get to know their students and adhere to their needs. The school provides many extra-curricular opportunities for their students from basketball to soccer, dance, cheer, Beta Club, Art and Theater and so many opportunities for them to do positive things in their community.

My son [REDACTED] has an IEP and has struggled with reading for years. He feels ashamed when he struggles at LOL Steam, he gets more one on one and does not feel like the other students will pick on him because the kids there are different from the ones in public school, where they are taught to respect one another and help each other out. [REDACTED] feels comfortable reading in front of his class. He talks about how the teachers don't rush him to do his work and they actually take the time to help him with things he struggles with and don't get upset with him if he needs extra help. There are little to no behavior issues and my son doesn't feel the need to have to fit in with the crowd. I fear for my son at the local middle school here where children are exposed to drugs, sex, and gangs. **I want my son to feel safe and not feel like he needs to be someone that he is not.**

My niece [REDACTED] has faced so many different challenges from her father being killed and her mother losing custody to her and her 5 siblings to which she is the oldest. [REDACTED] was bullied her 6th and 7th grade year and cried almost every day not to go to school. The second semester of her 7th grade year she began to get in fights being tired of being bullied into which the system failed her and deemed her as the problem. My niece has suffered from mental breakdowns and self-harm from cutting herself and wanting to take her own life. I know I had to find an environment better to suit her needs not only for her education but that would suit her mental and emotional needs as well. Since she has been at LOL Steam, she has been so much happier and wants to be involved with school and doing positive things in school. She gets up excited everyday talking about how the teachers care and the students as well work together, and everyone is always happy and smiling.

As much as I would love to pay for my children's education, I just don't make enough money to afford tuition for their school. This would cause me to have to pull them from the school they have grown to love. The school that they feel safe and cared for individually. I don't want to change my children from their comfort zone back to public school and feel as though I failed them from providing the best educational opportunity available to them. I feel as though this will affect them mentally and emotionally in a negative way.

Sincerely,

██████████

A Concerned Parent
Hartsville, SC

I am utterly devastated by this news. The impact of this decision on my family is nothing short of catastrophic. We carefully planned and budgeted around the expectation that our child's tuition at a nonpublic school would be covered under this program. Now, with no warning, that security has been stripped away, leaving us in an unimaginable situation.

While I understand that expenses like tutoring and therapies will still be eligible, the loss of tuition coverage threatens to derail my child's education entirely. We enrolled her in this school because of the specialized support they desperately need, and I fear we won't be able to continue providing that without the help we were promised. This sudden change has left us overwhelmed, and we're struggling to figure out how to move forward.

I have already contacted my child's school, and there are absolutely no financial options available—any assistance was depleted earlier this year. To receive this devastating news at the last minute has only made things worse, leaving us scrambling with no clear path forward.

I appreciate that you are working toward a solution, but right now it feels like we are left in limbo, with our child's future hanging in the balance. What options do families like mine even have? I'm hopeful that the "least disruptive path" you mention can offer some real relief, because at this moment, we feel completely abandoned.

Please continue to keep us updated with any information or solutions as soon as possible. We are desperate for a way forward.

My name is Daniel ██████████, and my wife and I have three children. My son is 10 years old. He is a wonderful, smart, creative, loving boy. He does very well in school, usually making the honor roll. However, many times he has struggled to fit in.

He is presently in the fifth grade. Between preschool and fifth grade, he has attended six different schools. Part of the reason is because we were living out of state and moved back to South Carolina in 2020, so I could live closer to my aging parents.

My son attended two different public schools in the low country. Neither my wife nor I were satisfied with the large classes, or the ways it was having a negative impact on our son emotionally and socially.

I work two jobs to provide for my family. I do not make a lot of money, and as a result qualify for Medicaid. Two years ago, my wife and I explored the option of sending our son to Coastal Christian Preparatory school in Mount Pleasant, SC. We liked the school, but when we saw the price we knew we could not afford it.

Then, last February we heard about the Education Trust Fund Scholarship. We applied and received it. We were overwhelmed with gratitude! We immediately asked Coastal Christian to apply to be a recipient of this fund, which they did and were approved.

Our family and friends rejoiced with us, for this wonderful program and its provision for my son.

My son has been at the school for two months. The teachers and faculty are so kind and helpful. My son is making good friends at school. The classes are small with only nine students, which provides great personalized attention and education. He is growing in positive ways emotionally, socially, academically and relationally. My wife and I have been rejoicing over the last month that we finally found the right school for our dear son.

You can't imagine the utter shock and heartbreak we experienced when we got an email saying that the tuition funds are no longer available because of the South Carolina state Supreme Court ruling.

Whoever filed this lawsuit against the trust fund, does not have the best in mind for the citizens and hard working taxpayers of South Carolina. They do not have in mind the best interests of these children. **To freeze the funds and then force these children to leave the schools they have been attending for the 2024-25 year is cruel and extremely harmful to these children academically, socially, emotionally, and relationally.**

These are our hard earned tax dollars, and we as parents deserve the right to choose where our children will receive the best education - that meets their specific, personal needs. I guarantee you that my wife and I know our son and his educational and personal needs infinitely better than a stranger sitting 100 miles away in a government office in Columbia, SC. My son's school let us know they do not have any scholarships or ability to help us financially with tuition. My son and our family would be devastated and heartbroken to pull our son from his new school and friends and teachers that he loves.

Last night, I had to make a tuition payment of \$970 on my credit card. That could impact future provision for the needs of my family. The Supreme Court decision was completely heartless and uncalled for, and is causing harm to thousands of families.

We are praying for a miracle that this Supreme Court decision will be overturned, and that somehow the trust fund scholarship money will be made available again quickly, so our kids can continue to get the education they need and deserve.

Daniel [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A father in Mount Pleasant

I am a mother of 6 school students that were recipients of scholarship. We are a family of 15. When this scholarship came out, I considered it an answered prayer! Finally my dream came true. My children can finally attend a private school. It has always been a dream of mine, but would have been very hard to achieve financially. We were all so excited to start the new school year. **Our family invested quite a bit of money into purchasing school supplies, uniforms and other essentials.** 2 of my kiddos would be starting school for the very first time! Everything was going well, the children were living their new school. Until that evening when we received the devastating news that our scholarship was no longer available for our children!! I felt really sick to my stomach! It was veer hard for me to break the news to my children without crying! Our children were devastated!! They have already physically and emotionally attached to the school, teachers and everyday schedule. **Everyday they ask me how much longer they can stay at their school before they are kicked out** 🤔. I am left trying to figure out what I am going to do, where am I going to send my children to? We are into the second month of school. If the children do start attending another school, they will be behind in the current school year. The Supreme Court ruled that this scholarship was unconstitutional, but I think that it's even more unconstitutional to do that to our children! **We are faithful tax payers, therefore should be able to choose the school that would fit our children better. Our tax dollars should not only be limited to the public school system. Public school isn't for everyone! Every families situation is different.** This decision has devastated very many families and their children, as well as the school that they chose to attend. Please reconsider this awful and dreadful decision, and do what is right for the children, their families and their schools of choice! Thank you and may God bless you!

A mother in Spartanburg

Since preschool, my daughter has attended St. Martin' [DePorres Catholic School]. She had such a wonderful year, especially academically which is why I chose to let her continue to kindergarten here . While attending st martin My daughter has been earning about God, which is what I appreciate most about Saint Martin. I find it very significant that this is a God-fearing, prayerful school! Since the classes are small and intimate, I am certain that my child is receiving the necessary attention. In fact, this is the first year that I have used the education scholarship trust fund program for her! This scholarship grant has been a huge assistance to me! It's already challenging to make ends meet with the current rate of inflation. It's a little frustrating that the school year has already started and the scholarship is now being revoked. I'm mindful that I won't have sufficient funding for tuition. I would now have to move my child and enroll her in public school, which isn't ideal in my opinion. Private schools, offer a variety of enrichment activities that go above and beyond the required curriculum. I believed that the faculty at St. Martin was preparing my child for success in school. There is a need for this scholarship. It is not unconstitutional in my opinion. They should really reevaluate this choice, as it may have detrimental effects on many families and their kids.

A mother in Columbia

I am a parent of one of many of the children affected by this court decision. I, like many parents, wanted a better education for my child. As a single parent, I could not afford to pay the tuition and all of the other costs associated with school alone. When we were told about this scholarship, I applied immediately. I knew this would be a blessing to my family and I if we received this scholarship.

After waiting for months to find out any information concerning the scholarship, we finally got word that we were one of the recipients. My 11 year old daughter and I were both so happy and thankful. We knew this was one less thing for us to worry about. I had peace of mind knowing she would receive a Christian education as well.

Our family really depended on this scholarship for assistance with my child's expenses. Now my daughter may have to switch schools if I am unable to pay all of her expenses myself. I think it is unfair and unthoughtful for the legislature to just blindly make a decision like this without weighing the cost it would have on so many families and schools. We should not be punished for wanting a better education for our children. A better education for our children in turn reflects on our communities. These will be our future leaders and we should have no problem investing in them.

I am truly devastated by the court's decision regarding the ESTF program. I am a single mother and was awarded the scholarship for my two children who are African American.

My son has ADHD and struggled really hard last school year in public school. His teachers as well as his guidance counselor were very unsupportive in making certain accommodations for him at school. He was bullied by classmates for asking questions and not comprehending certain things. His self esteem and confidence drastically changed. He got to the point that he was afraid and ashamed to ask for help in class or to ask any questions. As a result he failed and was required to attend summer school. I can not stress enough how incredibly difficult this was for me as a single mom. "So much for no child left behind."

Due to my children's ages they are not able to be home alone while I work. I have to pay for after school care during the regular school year because I work until 5:30 pm. However, during the summer my children usually go out of town to stay with their grandparents Monday-Friday. With my son being in summer school which was dismissed at 12 pm each day. We faced a really difficult time financially due to me having to pay for additional after school care costs.

When I heard about the ESTF, I immediately applied. **My son deserves access to a better education. Since starting at his new school, he has gone from a 25 average in Math to a 60 in just a few weeks.** His Math teacher will also be offering free after school help starting in October. His confidence in learning and himself has changed since being in Private School. The smaller class setting with teachers that care and who update me daily on his progress is such a blessing.

Without the ESTF, I would not be able to afford the tuition for my son to remain at his new school. When I discussed the court's decision with him and told him that he may have to go back to Public School he cried and begged me to not send him back.

Public schools failed our family. It seems that receiving funding per child is more important than the well-being, education and success of every child. Not one teacher or counselor took the time or effort to work with my child or return my phone calls when I begged them to make certain accommodations for him.

I beg of you to please reconsider or do something to reinstate this funding.

My son has been diagnosed with Autism since he was 2 years old. He has spent many years in therapy to assist with his development and behaviors. This scholarship has given him an opportunity to be able to have a chance at being successful. Glen Forest allows my son to learn at his own pace and gives him the opportunity to succeed. I have nothing against public schools, however I feel they tend to lack the resources a child on the spectrum may require. Although, he has only been in school for about month, the progress he has made and the support he has been given has been amazing. When he was awarded the scholarship a weight was lifted off my shoulders because I knew he would have an opportunity to be in place that was truly meant for him. **Children with disabilities deserve a chance at an education that is meant for them. A parents socioeconomic status shouldn't affect the education a child with disabilities should receive.** Please reconsider, and allow the children to keep the scholarships.

Signed,

A concerned parent in Lexington

The loss of scholarship funds has had a profound impact on our family. **For my children, the scholarship was more than just financial support—it was a beacon of hope and a catalyst for their educational ambitions.** They have invested so much effort and commitment into their studies, and losing this support has placed an immense burden on them. The stress of potentially not being able to continue their education as planned is both discouraging and disheartening. Both of my children have adapted well to their new school and it gives me comfort as a parent knowing that they are in a safer environment. The public school that my daughter would have been attending found 5 guns on students in the first week of school. No parent should have this concern when they sending their children to school, yet our public schools are not on track for the better. It is heart breaking and shameful to see the school district that I graduated from 18 years ago in this position.

For our family as a whole, the financial strain is significant. We are now faced with the challenge of finding alternative ways to cover the costs of education, which has forced us to reconsider our budget and priorities. This situation has not only added financial pressure but also emotional strain, as we navigate the uncertainty and stress of how to make up for the lost funds. The scholarship funds have been a key element in our plans, and the loss of this funding has disrupted our sense of security and stability. As a single mother of two navigating through our troubled world, the scholarship fund had given me a little peace of mind.

Overall, the impact has been far-reaching, affecting not just our immediate financial situation but also our emotional well-being and future plans. We are working hard to find solutions, but the

loss of this financial support has undeniably created a challenging and difficult period for our family.

Good Morning, I've been trying to get my words together to type. But every time I start I get emotional. When this opportunity first came about I was so happy knowing her dad had passed and he was my help for paying for school. Now this month probably be my child last month going to the school. The fear of putting her in public school is all I can think of. I pray the congress come up with something at least for this year.

My son, [REDACTED], has a rare genetic mutation. So rare that there is not even a name for it. The doctors can only tell us that it is a "variant of unknown significance." But, it clearly affects him. He gets easily distracted, struggles academically, has a significant speech and language disability, and is very small for his age. He is in the sixth grade and is about the size of a 3rd grader. The ESTF grant allowed [REDACTED] to go to a private Catholic school where we didn't have to worry about him being trampled in the hallways of 100+ sixth graders. Instead, he was in the classroom with 15 sixth graders. **The private school accepted him for who he was and even set up a speech therapist to work with him one on one during the week.** Public school was trying to say he no longer needed the service. Public school allowed him to sit in a classroom where he was passed over for not being able to complete the material and never had the time to help him. In private school, where he was attending until the ruling, he was completing work in his Spanish class, religion class, bringing home A's on quizzes in science and social studies. He was not being ignored in private school and given the help that he needed. I understand we can use the grant for therapies, but most of those are privately owned. So, why can we use the grant for private therapy but not a private school? **We are now faced with the difficult decision of trying to find the money to pay for a school that has far exceeded our expectations for our special needs son and putting him back in public school where they just ignore him.**

Hola soy la madre de [REDACTED] y el ba ala escuela catolica y cursa el grado k5 de divine reedemer y realmente nosotros ...contamos con esa ayuda de que ustedes le dieron ami hijo [REDACTED] ..y tenemos tanta nesesidad que eso nos ayuda de mucho para pues el desarrollo de [REDACTED] fisico y mental es muy importante que nos ayuden y realmente estamos tristes de no poder pagar mas el colegio ese es un colegio lleno de esperanza y aprendisaje alos niños los maestrso exelentes y la enseñanza de estudios y valores porfavor piensen en mi hijo

I would like to share my frustration with the way in which this has been handled. Our daughter is a 7th grader and after a very disappointing 6th grade year in a public middle school we decided to withdraw her. The public middle school we are zoned for is a very inferior school so we

applied for choice to a different middle school in the same district and she was approved to go to that school. When the opportunity arose for the possibility to be able to send her to a private school with the voucher assistance we were thrilled! **We waited all the way up until the week before school started back for the Supreme Court ruling results before withdrawing her but it never happened so we decided to move forward in faith.** We knew that once withdrawn, she would lose her choice spot. She began her new school and is truly thriving in every way and we love it as well! I can't imagine her ever going back into the public school system and unfortunately we are unable to afford the tuition without the assistance. My husband is a transplant patient and therefore private school tuition is not a viable option for us. The public school system environment has become so toxic for children and the beliefs and ideologies that are accepted are detrimental to their education, personal growth, and well being as a future generation. **I am so disappointed that this case was handled in such an irresponsible and reckless manner not taking any of the children lives and families into consideration. The court had plenty of time to make a ruling on this case prior to the new school year.** Had they done so, this entire mess could have been prevented and should have been prevented. All parents should have the right to their child obtaining the best education possible. I still pay taxes toward the public school system and will continue to do so, therefore I should not be penalized by the thought that they will be missing out on funds. My prayer is that the three judges will reconsider their vote and make this legal like the other great states that have already done so! If they won't reconsider then the decision must be appealed expeditiously. We need to do whatever we can to make this happen! **The state of South Carolina needs to be a leader in education and join others in this Great Leap Forward for our future leaders!** Thank you for your time and the opportunity to be heard!

A mother in Columbia

I am at a complete loss of words. Devastating news that will detrimentally affect my family. I am a full time student in my last year of dental hygiene school and my husband works full time. With me being in school and the demands that come with the rigorous program that I am in; I cannot work full-time. To be honest, I can barely work part-time.

With this ruling now stating that we can no longer utilize the funds for an education suitable for our children (considering our local school district and its condition) put me in a state of panic, frustration, and anger.

What are we supposed to do? Uproot my children and disrupt their learning because I can no longer afford to keep them at the school that they are at? Place in a school that I know for a fact would not provide the type of learning environment that they are currently in? And how do I

know about said environment? I used to work for the school district that I have been trying to avoid.

What do we do? **Someone needs to go back to the table to figure this out.**

The recent court ruling to end the ESTF scholarship has left my family in a state of confusion and deep hardship. We received a clear and definitive email stating that our daughter was awarded a \$6,000 scholarship, which led us to believe her tuition would be covered. Now, with the Supreme Court's decision, we find ourselves in a difficult situation, scrambling to find alternative ways to make payments for her education. This experience has starkly highlighted the precariousness of financial support; what seems assured can be taken away by a higher authority, leaving families like ours in distress. **We had qualified for the scholarship due to our lower income, and despite contributing taxes akin to those of families whose children attend public schools, it feels unjust that such funding is not available for private education as well.** Perhaps there should be exemptions from school taxes for families in our position, as the current system overlooks our needs and those of many others seeking quality education for their children.

Hi good afternoon, to whom this my concern.

I was very relieved when I heard my daughter was approved for the grant. It was sure a blessing for her to be able to continue at Saint Anthony's Catholic School.

It's just an amazing school and she loves it so much.

My son also attends there as well that are doing so great.

But when I found out that they had canceled it I was very upset. I am worried that my kids will have to change schools.

And as a Catholic household it is very important to us.

I hope something can work out it's a great benefit for us and I am sure as well as me it helps a lot of families.

My family has been greatly blessed by the ESTF program, and going to be greatly impacted as well as devastated by the unfortunate decision. My son and daughter are in kindergarten and

have made great strides at Sumter Christian School. I am a single mother and if the program is revoked I have no choice but to pull my children from the school, friends and teachers that they have grown to love. I know this will impact their education moving forward and hope this is reconsidered as I know there are many families and children impacted by this decision. Thank you for your time and consideration.

A mother in Sumter

Through this letter we want to inform you that we have been highly affected in our economic part and especially in the emotional part of our family when we received the news that we will not be able to pay the monthly tuition of our son's school with the scholarship that was assigned to us, thanks to this scholarship our son was able to enter this school but we have seen the painful decision that next month we must take our son out of the school where he is (St Josephs Catholic School - Greenville) because we do not have the necessary resources to be able to pay that value, we gave this news to our son the same day we received it, we are a very close family and we all must be aware of what concerns the family, my son at this moment is very affected because he was just beginning to make new friends and he felt very comfortable with his teachers and classmates, we respectfully ask you to reconsider this decision at least for this year so as not to affect the academic and emotional part of our son, we remain attentive to new news in relation to this difficult decision.

A mother in Greenville

I have 4 children who are currently enrolled in Westgate Christian school. We joined this school because my children were able to get ESTF funding. This was a dream come true for my family. Now we are in a loss of words and in disbelief not sure what is coming next. Kids are so sad and disappointed. They ask me daily do we have to leave this school that we love. I have children in 7th, 5th, 3rd and 5k. We will not be able to afford going forward with the rest of the tuition cost. Our school don't provide any other scholarship or financial help. I'm not sure what to do and how to provide this wonderful education for my children. **How can I rip them out of this school year.** They just started their curriculum and going back to public school will make them be not on same level . And imagine my 5k son being so emotional when he learn that he has to leave his teacher . Looking for help .

A mother in Spartanburg



Before the Supreme Court Ruling our family had been praying for more school options and choices for our children in the State of South Carolina.

We are a family that don't have much when it comes to finances, but we deserve school choices and options.

My older daughter is considered advance and scored very well on state testing. The public school tested her at the beginning of 2nd grade and told us she had already met all of her standards for the 2nd grade level on the second week of school. We ask the school if she could be taught 3rd grade level work and was told it was not allowed in the public school.

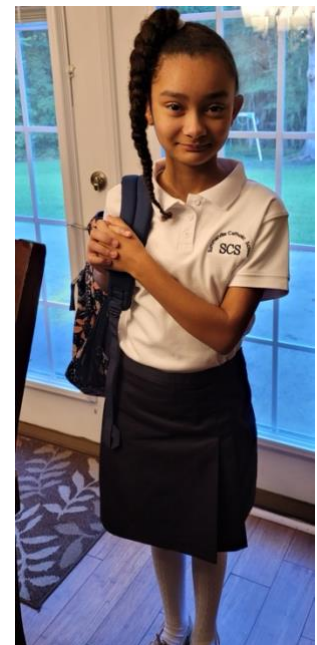
One my daughter began 3rd grade - only her and one other student in her class could read and barely do math. This was really shocking and sad.

If you're wondering, my daughter learned to read while in private school kindergarten in Florida using private school voucher. She still loves to read. I now have 2 more daughters who were both in SC public schools and are struggling to read.

We want smaller classrooms and more rigorous assignments to prepare our children for success and we know the private school can provide this.

We deserve to have school choices for our children. In our county, Schools are decided by school zones and that's not fair. Our neighboring states are making changes and offering parents choices, including private school vouchers.

Taking this opportunity away from our children has created a major stress for them and our family. We will not be able to afford tuition on our own. What are the families supposed to do after the devastating decision? Should these students at least be grandfathered until a decision is made.



They love they new school, new teachers, administration and are thriving.

Please, please don't take this away from them.

A mother from Summerville

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing with deep concern regarding the potential loss of the grant that has enabled my child to attend Harmony School through your program. The grant has been an absolute blessing for our family, providing my daughter the opportunity to attend a school where she has flourished both academically and emotionally.

Before joining the program, my daughter faced significant challenges in larger classroom settings, but since attending Harmony School, her love for learning has completely transformed. She is now thriving, showing remarkable progress in her studies, and her confidence has grown immensely. The smaller class sizes and nurturing environment have allowed her to stay focused and overcome obstacles that previously hindered her. Losing this grant would be devastating not only for my daughter but also for our entire family.

Due to a severe financial hardship, I simply do not have the means to cover the tuition without this vital support. I am deeply concerned about the emotional and educational toll it would take on her if she were forced to leave a school that she has come to love so much.

Returning to a larger classroom setting would undo much of the progress she has made, and it would truly crush her spirit to be pulled away from a place where she feels safe, happy, and engaged. I understand that financial assistance is limited, but I humbly ask you to reconsider and allow us to continue receiving the grant or explore any possible alternatives, such as extending the grant temporarily or offering a payment plan based on our financial situation. I am doing everything I can to improve my financial situation, but at this moment, I am unable to manage the cost of her tuition without this essential aid.

This program has been life-changing for my daughter, and it would mean the world to both of us if she could continue to attend the school she cherishes. Please let me know if there is any way to work together to find a solution. Thank you for your time, understanding, and consideration.

A mother in Columbia

I would like to start off by thanking you for letting our voices be heard.

Our family was overjoyed to be chosen as one of the 3,800 families to receive the SCESTF.

██████████ our 5 year old is the recipient. **He has no idea that Mommy stayed up all night long to make sure we would be one of the first 5,000 families to complete the SCESTF application.** Mommy was tired but at the time I felt it was more than worth it, only missing a few hours of sleep that is.

We wanted so badly for ██████████ to go to Holy Trinity Catholic School. This school is within our Parish. We did not however know how in the world we would ever be able to afford the added expense of a private Catholic school.

This seemed almost impossible given that within a 9 month period families have to pay almost \$900 a month by the time you figure in uniforms, books , tuition, gas , food and added expenses like field trips.

My family literally fought for 15 years from 2007 until 2022 to get my husbands green card for permanent residency.

Fast forward to ██████████'s 3rd birthday. Our Family was in Federal Immigration Court awaiting permission to leave the country and go to El Salvador to get his Visa.

Next, we were relieved to be granted voluntary removal all the while paying very expensive DC attorneys. Which previously we were thankful just barely able to afford due to being business owners and having plenty of credit.

Just before we left to go to El Salvador, my husband's business partnership fell apart. We were not paid off, but thankfully we were still given our profit share from the prior year we almost had to beg for it. Without it I don't know how we could have recovered it was nothing to do some people only about \$25k but, at this point we owed people about 22k and we had been forced to payoff our house that was owned by one of the business partners.

We were seriously in debt , mentally distraught and uncertain of how we were going to dig out. Fast forward from April 2022 to January 2024 we were doing everything we could to make the right financial decisions. Paying as much debt off as we could to fight interest, not using government aid. Instead choosing to coupon, be frugal meaning never eat out or buy new clothes. At least we had our health and a house.

Well, I did end up getting ██████████ Medicaid. We just had trouble imagining how we were to pay for a pediatric cardiologist. ██████████ has a heart murmur it's only a one. Thank god! nonetheless we still have to keep an eye on it it hasn't closed yet.

Then there is me. I had emergency surgery in May to remove a very very sick gallbladder. So, we didn't have much of a summer. I thought that I would be able to work my seasonal job. Not this year.... Luckily my husband and brother-in-law were able to do it for me this year. It's taken me about 3 months to recover and I still can't lift anything heavier than a laundry basket. My mom came over for the first 3 days after my surgery. But, she has a pacemaker and has to take care of my sisters 4 children biweekly. My sister passed away at the age of 29 leaving behind 4 children.

Right after my Grandmother died and she was like a mother to all of us. Jose and I tried for 12 years to have a baby and right after agreeing to adopt our 16 yearold niece so that she could come from Guatemala back to the United States to go to Highschool. We found out we were pregnant with [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] who fully and completely deserves a choice to go to a school that has strong core values that teaches him about GOD and all things Holy to learn how to be not only smart. But, to be a child of god and a person whose faith is just as important as his education. This simply cannot possible in 2024 be achieved in public school.

Please let us use the money to chose to pay for our child's education as we see fit based on our core values and not be dictated by others who may not share the same beliefs and values.

I could keep going and as unfortunate as this situation is I know that we as a family will preserve because we have GOD in our lives and do not live our lives based on what the South Carolina Supreme Court decides.

Also , we can't take him out of school he's already adjusted. We also can't pay out of pocket. My husband becomes eligible for citizenship in April we will need to be ready to pay legal fees. Just a retainer is 3 to 5 k.

Thank you for your time!!!

I would love to share my child's story. **He was bullied in public elementary school for three years because he didn't wear name brand shoes.** In our home there are more important things than spending hundreds of dollars on name brand shoes.

I did not know about the bullying until the last few months of fifth grade. He was scared to tell me for fear of the five boys threatening to "jump him" on the play ground. At one point he even started asking the custodians of the school if he could help them so that he would not have to go out for recess.

The entire time he was in his public elementary he never had one friend. This isn't an exaggeration, he really had no friends. It something he prayed for on a regular basis.

When I brought the bullying to the principal's attention, it finally stopped. However, he continued to help the custodians because he was concerned that they didn't have enough help.

We were very concerned that those same children would be back to bullying in middle school. When I found out about this program, we were so excited! If we could be accepted into the program, he would have the opportunity to be in a safe environment and learn some wonderful values as well.

When we found out that we were accepted, it was truly a blessing from God!!! See I have had custody of him and his three siblings since 2021. All have had a tough time due to some unfortunate family problems. This finally gave him a new opportunity!

He started Sumter Christian School and has loved it! I think all 6th graders have a difficult time with some transitioning, but he has enjoyed much of the new school. He has already learned so much, and didn't know that the United States borders Canada. (I didn't realize how much he didn't know from public school.)

He currently has been learning to play saxophone, learning that there are so many countries, and that math can make sense. Above all the academic possibilities he now has, he came home the first week talking about his new FRIENDS!!! He now has been able to fit in and have a normal social life with real friends to talk to.

As crazy as it sounds, the best part of it all was when he got in the car one day a couple of weeks ago and said he had a great day because "I finally got a girlfriend." This may not mean anything to someone else, but when you are so lonely with no friends and have had such a rough 11 years of life... a girlfriend was just what he needed.

This opportunity had given one little boy more than just education, it has given life to his heart.

We will be forever grateful for the blessing of the ESTF program.

A mother in Sumter

My 13 year old was almost failing 6th grade in the public school we were zoned for. Which is a great school by the way. I reached out to the guidance counselor, principal and had conferences with the teachers. None of that helped, she was still coming home not soaking in any information, a ball of nerves going to school, too shy to ask questions, failing test etc.. The school was suggesting her to get evaluated by their psychologist for ADD, etc. Which no one even contacted us to do that either and the school year went by barely passing, which now I'm glad they did not because that same year I found a very small tutoring center in our area that she started going to afterschool and the next school year her grades went from D's in 6th grade to A's in 7th grade. The tutoring center I found is also a small independent micro school, we decided with the scholarship money we would put her there since they accepted the scholarship money. She is thriving there! **She has so much more confidence, she is able to get more individualized learning with the school being so small only 4-6 students in her class, making A's, not nervous about test anymore, and has made a total 360. All she needed was that smaller class size and that more one on one learning,** and not be evaluated by a psychologist like they suggested just to push medicine and a diagnosis on her that she didn't need. The public school could not help with that. We will be affected by the supreme courts ruling.

My name is Lydia Bartley. We received the ESTF scholarship this year for our daughter Rylee. Rylee is in K5. She is on the autism spectrum. We wanted a smaller school and smaller classroom for her so that it would all be less overwhelming. We felt her chances of success would be higher this way. We can't afford private school so we were ecstatic to receive the ESTF scholarship and have the opportunity to put her in a school where she is thriving. This news is very difficult to digest and we don't know what will happen next.

Lydia Bartley
A mother in Greenville

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my profound disappointment regarding the recent cancellation of the ESTF scholarship. This unforeseen change has significant implications for our family's financial situation, and it feels particularly disheartening given the trust and planning we had based on the initial scholarship awarded.

The scholarship was awarded to us based on specific criteria, including our lower income status. If we had not met those criteria, we would not have been considered for this scholarship in the first place. Knowing that financial support was granted under these circumstances makes the cancellation even more difficult to comprehend.

Had we been informed earlier about the possibility of the scholarship being revoked, we would have taken the necessary steps to prepare, including developing a backup plan. This unexpected cancellation leaves us at a loss, as we are now faced with the challenge of affording payments independently. We had anticipated this support as part of our financial strategy, and its removal has disrupted our plans in a considerable way.

Moreover, as taxpayers, we contribute to our educational system just like everyone else. It raises questions about the fairness of this decision, especially when public schools do not align with our desire to teach our child the Christian values we hold dear. We believe that every family should have the right to an education that reflects their beliefs and values.

We are truly saddened by this situation. Our expectation was to work alongside the scholarship program to ensure our child received the education that aligns with our faith. Instead, we now find ourselves grappling with not only financial challenges but also the disappointment of not having support when we had every reason to believe it was secure.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our perspective. We hope that in the future, clearer communication about such potential changes can be prioritized, and we sincerely hope for an opportunity to discuss this matter further.

I am writing to express my deep concern and share my story regarding the devastating impact of the recent decision to eliminate ESTF funding. As a parent of three children attending Westgate Christian School, this ruling has left my family in an extremely difficult position. Without the financial support provided by the ESTF, we can no longer afford to keep our children enrolled in the school that has become such an important part of their lives.

Westgate Christian School has provided my children with an educational environment that meets their needs spiritually, academically, and emotionally. It breaks my heart to think that they may be forced to leave due to circumstances beyond our control. The loss of this scholarship not only threatens their education but also disrupts their stability and the community they have come to cherish.

I hope you can include our story as part of the growing number of families whose lives have been upended by this decision. We fully support your efforts to fight back and urge the Supreme Court to reconsider this ruling. It is crucial that the voices of the families most affected are heard, and I believe that with your help, we can make a difference.

A mother in Spartanburg

Our family is located in Williamston, SC (Anderson County) and are absolutely devastated by the Supreme Court ruling to remove our educational funding for alternative schooling.

We have had our child in public school K4-3rd grade. We have sought help from public school administration, faculty, counselors and aides to find a path of success for our child's education for all five years. **However, our zoned school is so overwhelmed with population they cannot meet our needs.** We live in a school zone that allows school choice. **We have reached out to those schools routinely for 5 years to be told their population is too high to accept a school choice.** We have a one of a kind public charter school in our area in which we have applied to since it opened. We have never been accepted in the lottery they use for selection. We have reached out to the district about all these proposed avenues that remain closed to us and at best we hear "try again next year" or "speak with admin at school level again to see if things have changed". Frankly, the public school system is not working for the general population so how in the world can it support student in need of a slightly different learning experience.

This year we have been able to find alternative schooling for our child that fits her needs. Classroom size is much smaller. She is given individual attention and instruction. She is able to use montessori techniques to attain skillsets. She can be with like minded students in a small setting cooperatively working as a team. This never happened for her in public school and **WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT HAS BEEN. All of that was only possible due to the educational grant we received.**

My husband is a full time police officer. I am a preschool teacher. We have three children in school. We make just enough money to not qualify for government assistance but not enough money to afford alternative schooling. If this grant does not cover the rest of this school year, we will be forced to send our very brilliant child back to public school where her needs cannot be met and therefore she will not thrive. It is heartbreaking to uproot a child mid-semester and send them back to a place that knowingly does not work.

I plead with anyone in power to hear our desperation when I say please just give us this year. Please give our students just the year you promised them. This alternative schooling grant is more than education. This grant gives children who need it RELIEF from not fitting in a box. It gives them CONFIDENCE and HOPE that there is a real space out there where they can be their best self. This gives parents the ENCOURAGEMENT and SUPPORT they need to continue being their student's cheerleader and advocate. If going forward you cannot grant us the funding for alternative solutions, I will accept and keep searching for my child's best path.

However to start them on a journey and then rip it away from them is a complete disservice and a stumbling block in their education.

We received scholarship funds for 3 of our kids this year. It was promised to us to pay for school for whole year and for future coming years as well. **I would never let my kids go different schools just for 1 quarter.** They already changed schools last year due to moving and this year we changed again only because we were promised to be covered with tuition. We are not able to pay out of our pocket for 3 of my kids. I wish South Carolina education superintendent can appeal so we can still stay in school. Our kids devastating right now as they just made new friends.

We currently have two children enrolled at Hampton Park Christian School. One is in 8th grade and is in his third year there. The other is in 5th grade and this is his first year there. He is the recipient of the scholarship. Our intent was to enroll him next year when the older son went to high school at a public school, but since we received the scholarship, we moved him a year earlier. The reason we do it this way is because we cannot afford tuition for two kids in private school as I am a public school teacher and my wife stays home. I am not sure how we are going to make this work. Our only option without other financial assistance is to take money out of their college funds, something we really don't want to do.

It is wrong that this decision would be made after school has already started. At a minimum, it should proceed as passed this year and any changes should take place at the end of the 24-25 academic year.

A father in Greenville

So what brought my child to maranatha christian school he started in 4k and his teacher was amazing he learned to write his name and learned colors numbers and also learned bible verses which I loved. His teacher was amazing and actually took the time to teach him all new things and also my son enjoys learning about Jesus. I chose the school for all the right reason because when I was in public school I didn't get a good learning experience due to the kids all being loud and making teachers cry and quit. Here at maranatha it's the total opposite and I'm glad to know my child is getting a education where he is actually learning and caring about his education. Because I have watched my son grow in many ways. And now that he is in 5k he learning alot more and also reading better and telling me about how his day was great. This scholarship means


the world to him and to go to a school he actually loves. He wouldn't change it for the world and would love to still continue there learning. He learns everything and they teach everything just like public schools but includes bible time which I love. Because they took away right to a bible in public schools where kids can't have a bible which is horrible. But maranatha is totally the opposite and I love it that that scholarship still continue on for private schools so the kids can learn about everything including bible time. **This scholarship means a whole lot to me for my son to get the education that I never got because I didn't get a chose on where I got to go.** I just wish this world would change the way they are looking at things and let this scholarship continue to help the ones who wants to know more. This scholarship helping my son get through school as to I have no income right now and it crazy that yall just wanna take away rights to him not getting a good education that I couldn't get in life. I struggle everyday to make sure my babies are getting a education and coming home to tell me about their day. **I just want a life for my kids that I never gotten a chance for.** This school is teaching these kids everything just like public school but more and I still wouldn't change my mind about it. These kids deserve a chance to go wherever and get a scholarship to go to a school they choose from and im talking about both public and private they should have a right to choose what would be better for them in the long run.

A mother in Florence

I am writing due to the very distressing news on the decision to no longer fund private Christian schools. This is an outrageous attack on our choice as parents to have a safe place for our children to learn and grow. It is unconstitutional to put the burden of the already struggling working class due to inflation. I am writing in hopes that this does not fall on deaf ears. We the people should have the right to not send our children to a public school. **This is a hardship on all of us parents who frankly already live paycheck to paycheck and is not able to afford safe care for our children.** It is unconstitutional to take back something that was approved have our children start then rip it away from us and then. Does anyone understand the toll this is taking on the kids who do not want to go to public schools and are having physical and emotional breakdowns knowing that they can no longer be in a healthy safe environment. Our working class pays enough taxes that this should not be an issue. The surplus's should not go into our politicians pockets. We the working class just want and need a break for us and for our kids. They deserve more. Please fight to have this overturned.

Sincerely,

A mother trying to make it in this world

Hope  from Anderson SC

For my family, and my child who is on the spectrum, this is beyond devastating. He was struggling for public schools to provide him everything he needed to learn and feel comfortable and confident and safe with going to school. It was a fight everyday with the school because they were failing him as an individual and a student. He essentially hated school, and we had to beg him to go everyday! This opportunity gave him a whole new outlook on school, he has settled into a smaller private school where he is thriving and is in the best place mentally, emotionally and educationally. We cannot afford this school without this grant and to take some many years to come to this decision, to make such a difference for so many students who need it, to now just rip that away is wrong and poor on everyone's part! We have no clue what we are going to do and this is not fair! My child is settled into his school and we've invested our own money for uniforms and everything to make him successful and your decision is robbing us of him receiving the education he deserves! I as a parent am suppose to provide my child with stability and a safe environment to be successful and this poor decision has disrupted every bit of that, and we still have no other answers of how to move forward! You are putting tons of peoples lives in turmoil and it's utterly unacceptable! I was finally able to breathe and feel confident in his education and that his needs were being met and you just pull the rug right out from underneath us all! This is highly disappointing and adding so much unnecessary chaos we did nothing to deserve, you shouldn't have made the decision two months after school started and kids are already settled and now everything has to change for them, it's hard enough to start a new school when you have struggles already and now he's got to change schools again because yall so illy change your minds. Once again this is wrong!

Our children were both withdrawn from the school in our home district in the end of the 2nd grade. They had both been bullied, and the school system there is one of the worst in the state. Since we could not afford to pay tuition, even to another public school, we enrolled them in homeschool. They were homeschooled until this year, and because they received the grant, they were able to enroll in a local private school as freshman. Private school was not our first choice. We wanted to enroll them into the school district where we work. Unfortunately very few public schools have signed up to participate in the grant program and none were available local to us. They have been in school for a month, and are both enjoying it. They both need to learn the socialization skills they have never had. They also need the structure that brick and mortor schools provide. If we have to remove them from this school, they will have to go back to homeschooling as our local school is one of the worst in the state and we fear for their safety. They are both very upset by this. We cannot afford to pay out of district tuition. If the state does not want us to use the funding on private schools, there should be a way to use it towards public schools without the school having to sign up for the program. Now that we are already enrolled

in the school that was available, I believe the kids should atleast be able to finish the year there. We will have to scramble to re enroll them in homeschooling if it's not too late for the year.

Hi, my name is Sonia [REDACTED] and I now have to pull my son from his new school and disrupt his learning environment again to bring him back to his public school that is overrun with non english speaking students that outnumber the English speakers in the room. The poor teachers have to accommodate these newcomers and neglect the needs of native english speakers. I applied for this scholarship to give my son the opportunity to a smaller learning environment where he is with other students like him and would get the attention and the instruction he needs to learn and grow.

This decision has made him and us his parents heartbroken to have to rip him out of a school that he has started to love and become successful at. We cannot afford to continue to fund his private education otherwise and feel its unfair that all these newcomers are afforded all this free education and free lunches but we have to sit and deal with it because we have no other choice because of the cost of private education.

We are very upset that our tax dollars can pay for these people who pour into our country and schools and disrupt the learning environment because they do not speak the language. It is not fair that we have to send our kids to schools that have this happening and have no other options because of the cost.

Thank you for supporting us through this, and would appreciate if you could at least honor those who are in this program currently and not make us have to compromise our children's school year.

I wanted to take the time to let you know how this has impacted me and my daughter one I am a single parent and wanted to put my child in a school that is safe due to public schools are in such a critical state with the school shootings and bullying that has gotten worse which the child suicide rate is up and also God being pulled out of the school districts. When I found out that I was able to put my child in the school of choice I was so thankful and Praising God for the blessing that I was able to receive. I was very devastated to find out that once it was approved and my child started her school that it would be all taken away in a blink of a eye to possibly have to change schools due to not being able to afford it, I feel like that will disturb my daughters learning, I feel like it should be at least funded for this school. year and then change it for next year due the disruption of kids especially my daughter that has adjusted and feels safe where she is at. I am also a Tax Payer and works and due to Economy being up so high and the cost of groceries and

the cost of just living is crazy and like I said I am scared for my child well being right now being in public school. Please Reconsider this school year funding at least just for families to keep their child where they are at this time, and then change it for the next following school year so these families like myself can think of other options for our kids.

Our youngest daughter attended a local public school last year and absolutely hated it. She has ADHD (medically diagnosed) and was making all A's and B's on her report card, but she kept getting ruled into intercession for "not paying attention." I asked multiple times for an IEP or a 504 plan, but the school refused to evaluate her. Her teacher stated, "if she needed more time, all she had to do was ask for it." Our daughter started experiencing anxiety, frustration, and no longer wanted to attend school. At the same time, teachers within this school were being investigated for abusing special needs children. At the end of the day, we decided that we needed to withdraw our child from our local district and move her into a private school. We filled out the necessary paperwork for the ESTF scholarship so that we could afford to send her to a school that cares about her and her well-being. Without these funds, it has put our family in an extremely difficult position to pay for her tuition. **She loves her new school, but I am a stay-at-home mother and her step-father is a disabled veteran, who is currently unemployed as of July, 2024. We have no idea how we are going to be able to afford her educational expenses now.** Please continue to fight the most recent decision regarding the tuition assistance for private education. Children and parents deserve better educational options than South Carolina public schools.

I a single parent not by choice to a brilliant 5 year old daughter has been placed through many challenges this year losing my spouse working long 13 hour shift over night in a county jail trying to make ends meet . Being that I am a single parent I try my best to give my child the most opportunity's in education to make our future better . My daughter has just started kindergarten this school year she is absolutely thriving within her school she has amazing teachers and learning new things everyday , she is even learning to speak Spanish I get letters from her teacher stating she is a “ math and science queen” . **This school has been the light at the end of the tunnel and being I could not afford the education out of pocket these grands have absolutely blessed us as a family .** My grandma which is my daughters great grandmother has moved to South Carolina to ensure my daughter is going to school daily and on time since I have to work over nights I can't always drive my daughter to school . We are a Christian faith family and strong believers that the public school is exposing to many worldly things to children more than actually teaching educational opportunities .This private Christian school is teaching not only on a higher

Curriculum, then, public schools they are planting seeds of faith in our children in these trying times . This is against the constitution by taking these funds away by trying to separate education from religion . We as a parental community would appreciate a reconsideration. Most family can't afford these kinds of schools out of pocket due to inflation . The public school system is pushing children along without proper education by this I mean in public schools the classroom ratio from students to teachers are way off there is a overwhelming amount of children per class per teacher it is close to impossible for one teacher to teach and have one on ones with students if there are some falling through the cracks. It is also concerning that a public school student is a average of 15,000 per year and a privet school student is a average of 6,000 which is less than half of the cost of public schools and these students are more likely to receive a better and higher education. Please for the sake of our children reconsider these choices and funds thank you for the opportunity to be able to share my thoughts on this situation and god bless America .

I can't understand why they could not have made this decision a month ago before parents have spent money on uniforms, registration fees and additional costs just to turn around and have children uprooted a month into school! I literally cried for 2 hours when I heard this news as my Kindergarten son adores his teachers and school. I sure hope some action is taken. Someone clearly isn't thinking of the kids here at all. Just sad.

THE recent court decision to stop the funding for tuition for private schools is devastating

I had my son in public school he was in the 8th grade ,Reading at a 4th grade level he does have a learning disability. BUT Because of this Funding I placed him in a private school he read a book for the first time Im so proud of him,

But due to the courts decision he may have to be placed back in public school The public school system has failed him they just keep pushing him into the next grade not caring if he can read or do math you are taking his life away He is so happy right now ,how do we tell him we cant afford for him to go to this new school All anyone wants for there child is to see them succeed in school and in life . Without this school he will not .. The public schools had 8 years with my son and did nothing for him nothing to help, Just kept passing him on to the next grade how could this be ok this school is the perfect choice for him PLEASE REVERSE YOUR DECISION

I was so please that we were accepted for this scholarship. It would allow our children to get the education we wanted them to receive, while in a smaller classroom so they could get the attention they need to succeed. This program allowed us to give our children as close to a homeschooling experience as possible. With that said, I am unsure how we will be able to continue to pay for their tuition. We are already under immense financial stress with the cost of living being so high. I don't see how this is in anyway unethical as it was open for everyone. There are programs available to help other families out with school choices, why is this one being taken away?

I wanted to share our story and how this scholarship has changed our son's life. Last year he was attending a local public charter school where he was being sexually assaulted by a peer daily. This child was super sneaky and teachers were not seeing it happen and I spent many days up there. We had him transfered to the other class for his grade but the child was relentless and still found a way to traumatize my son. This scholarship made it possible for us to switch schools where he is thriving and has all As. With the changing of this scholarship we may have to put him back into that previous school and we are heartbroken! I pray our story helps in some way because we would never want another child to go through what we've been through.

We are very concerned that funds were pulled out from our schools. We have 2 students enrolled in private schools this year and started school a month ago. We are one parent working family and this was our hope for better education for our kids.

Now they pulled funds back and we we dont have any funds to pay back.

We cant pullback kids from school they have a hard time adjusting to new schools. And we just started a new school.

We had promise that this will be for a full year.

It was promised we can get funds for full year.

Please make a decision that helps parent to keep their school choice and keep them in school for this school year.

I am a grandmother to a 14 year old girl that I have full custody of. **This scholarship was a blessing, when she was in public school she was constantly bullied!!** Which caused her to suffer from headaches, stomach issues and over all thinking she wasn't as good as the other kids.

All of this in turn affected her grades so that she was barely passing. Fast forward to this school year, she entered a new school with new kids, teachers that she felt cared and she no longer has the issues she did in public school. She currently has all A's and has been inducted into the beta club. This never would have happened if she didn't get this opportunity. Now for it to be taken away!!! We are both concerned about the possible set backs she may face if she has to return to the public school setting. We pray the Supreme Court realizes that some kids do need this extra hand up in the world.

I am a single mom, who works full time as a cosmetologist. My son is currently enrolled into Saint Peter's Catholic School in Beaufort, South Carolina. I signed up in hopes to be eligible for the Education Scholarship Trust Fund. We got notification that we were eligible, and it lifted a huge weight off of my shoulders. Trying to pay bills, put food on the table, and provide your child with the best education in the county is not easy, especially on a single income.

Previously for Pre-k we had him enrolled into a public school where he was not doing very well, and was constantly getting in trouble. He was struggling academically & mentally. The teachers allowed the children to run the classroom and do as they pleased. There was no structure.

We took him out of the previous school in the middle of the school year & transferred him over to Saint Peter's. **Within a couple of weeks, we saw a huge improvement in his behavior. This year for Kindergarten, he is already learning words, how to read, math, etc. The smaller classroom environment sets him up for success, as he is a child who was diagnosed with ADHD and needs more one on one attention from the teacher.**

It is very disappointing and disheartening that I may not be able to continue to provide him with what he needs. I grew up in Beaufort, South Carolina. I know how the public school systems work and I have worked day in and day out to keep him where I know his needs will be met, and where I know he will have more of an advantage with education.

A mother in Beaufort

I want you to know what this is doing to my family. First we did not make the choice easily to change from public school to private school.

My son was having problems in 5th grade. Then in 6th grade he was not happy in school. He was not doing his work. He was not wanting to go. He would not tell us what was going on. I kept going to the school to talk with the teachers. They said they had not seen anything but he was lazy in his work. They knew he was smart. He moved up to the higher class. That didn't help either.

My son got ISS for hitting a boy. So I went to the school to find out what happened. from the teachers. I had already found out my sons side of the story. What I was told is that Mason had hit him and the other students seem it. No questions asked. I said well did you ask what the other kid did. No we didn't. Well the other kid had kicked my son. So as a reflex my son hit him in the leg.

I came to the conclusion I was not going to be helped at the school my son was going to. So when this opportunity came to us we took it.

I was afraid it wouldn't make a difference but guess what it made a world of difference. My son is doing his school work he is happy. No wanting to stay out of school. He is playing football. He is thriving and happy.

I also have a daughter that was doing fine in public school. She was shy and stayed to herself. Now in the private school she has friends and comes home happy. Not just content. She is learning so much more and has joined the PEP club. She is coming out of her shell and joining and wanting to do things.

My children are adopted and have had enough people letting them down. Children deserve to be happy in what they do. My Children are happy at Dillon Christian School. I need them to have this chance to grown and become what they want to become.

On another note I remember filling out papers to get this money to help my kids. I do not remember any of it being about anything but money grades and things like that so I am not sure why it is unconstitutional. A parent should be able to do what is best for their kids. We need kids to be happy so they can learn and prosper.

A mother in Dillon

I chose this particular private school because my child that I have custody of needs a smaller and more personal setting because of the things that has impacted her life. She has been in the care of DSS because of her mother's choices. **So to remove her from her school right after starting**

kindergarten just only a month ago is devastating to her. I feel we should at least finish out the school year. It's unfair to the children.

When we were approved for this we were beyond estatic. With the county we live in (Jasper) the public school system is no where near par so it's really no choice in sending our child or children to anywhere but a private school. We being of Faith chose to send our child to a private Christian school so the funds used went to an amazing place that will instill values into him as he continues to grow and learn.

Please reconsider this.

A parent from Jasper

To whom this may concern

May I start off by saying that I hope this letter will make a deep difference in a solution for myself and my child. The impact of losing this grant is by far the most devastating news to us, We had trusted this funding and highly depended on it to provide my son a stable education and safe environment, My son attended a High School for which he was zone for in the area we live in due to numerous attempts in applying for magnet and academy schools and kept getting turned down due to either being on a wait list or too many kids in the specific schools or not zone to go to that specific school, We were left with me having to do home schooling due to my son was afraid for his life going back to this High school being gang infested, kids fighting everyday, kids smoking in the bathrooms, teachers not caring for the students because the kids didn't care for their own education and the academic studies were a joke. My son did not belong in that type of environment. When we found out we were approved for this grant to attend a private school our worries and stress went away and were very happy that we can put that High School behind us and have a new start. Now with this detrimental news were left wondering how we can keep him in this private school. **I can not afford this tuition as I am a single parent and was very dependent on this money to get my child thru school.** He has started this new school, has met a lot of amazing kids and teachers and most importantly feels safe in this environment. He interacts with people and now playing sports as he has gained confidence. Please don't take this away from my child as we desperately need this grant for him to continue getting the best possible education.

I appreciate that efforts are being made to find a solution and I hope those in charge realize how urgently we need this resolved. We are counting on this grant to continue.

My spouse just retired from a career in the US military - He was deemed totally and permanently disabled from a combat-related TBI. I returned to graduate school several years ago to take over responsibilities as head of our household. **My daughter was being severely bullied at our local public school so we applied to the scholarship program to send her to private for the 24/25 school year.** We were relying on the funds to help offset the cost of tuition for this year - now we will have to make vastly higher tuition payments on disability pay until I obtain my license in January. This was unforeseen and has made us consider drastic financial measures to get through.

This was irresponsible of the state of SC to allocate funding and then renegotiate the terms after people paid for uniforms, school fees, application fees, started their children in school. Not to mention the social implications for the children whose parents may have to pull them from school. It does nothing but highlight the haves from the have-nots and it makes me ill to think that a child would have to endure this due to irresponsible legislation. If decisions are made to change the rules of engagement they can not be made after the rules are set in place and action has begun. That is called "playing Mao" (a reference to a card game in which the dealer makes the rules and the players don't know them until they come into play) and that is not what the great state of SC stands for. Thank you for your time.

I'm writing in concern on the funding, providing help then snatching it away is insane and unprofessional how do you have the funds to help people then snatch them away ? Sc I guess picks and chooses to not help the people that pay taxes here which is crazy you could have at least finished the school year out at least . I would like to talk to the person that decided this was a good decision then all of a sudden changed their mind.

I have applied for the funding due to giving my son a better education after being bullied for 2 years in public school. My son who is repeating 7th grade due to being bullied and not being motivated last year to do any work. His anxiety and nerves got to him so bad last year he would literally throw up before school due to not knowing how his day would go. I pulled him out of public school last November and put him into an online school. Being at home for school wasn't helping the situation and had put him into a depression. Thankfully I found Thomas Hart Academy in Hartsville SC to give him an opportunity at a different learning environment. I wouldn't have had the chance to put him into a private school due to only making 24,000 a year. I have 4 kids now. Since my son has started Thomas Hart Academy he has been making all A's

and excited for school everyday. He is in a smaller class and has improved a lot. I have asked the school if there was any way I can apply for financial aid to continue for my son to go there. It would be heartbreaking if I had to tell my son he could no longer go there. He is out of depression and loving school once again. Please rethink this decision and help him continue to grow and thrive at the this private school. I'm begging you from a mother's heart.

A mother in Hartsville

This impact is very much a big concern. I did this scholarship for my son to get a better education and it was supposed to be to pay for all his school needs including tuition and fees from the school. The scholarship was designed to give kids a chance to go to private school and it to pay for it. Moving my son to a school with this scholarship and now it being taking away is not acceptable because it was designed for the kids to go to all schools approved. It's totally impacted me because I don't have to money to send my son to private school but wanted him there for better education and to play baseball which he is very good at. I was paying for everything else but needed the tuition and fees paid that is what cost the most. I feel like this decision wasn't a good one do to this is what the scholarship was to be used for.

I am the single mother of two children who were receiving the scholarship. **When I first read the email with the news that the funding would no longer be able to be used for non-public school tuition my heart dropped.**

My children attend school in a county where the public schools are in the nicer terms "problematic". I am sure my children aren't the only ones.

But as a mom of a child with severe ADHD that causes severe anxiety, (medical diagnosed) I spent most of the previous school years praying my child could "make it" through just one more year. Or "let's just get through this year." As I was told he may have to repeat the grade. **Public schools are so overwhelmed with children that I believe children that need the extra help are barely scraping by because they don't get the assistance they need to fully receive the education they are required to.** We also had multiple incidents where my son was scared to go to school because so many fights were happening, to the point where he had been hit as a bystander at least twice.

As a parent it is my job to not only provide a roof, food, and the needs to survive but to also teach them to be respectful individuals and provide a proper education and the tools to succeed as an adult. When we were approved for the scholarship I had no doubt in my mind things would

get better, it was almost a sense of relief. My children would have a better chance of having a proper education and the resources they would need to succeed.

Both of my kids are now on A/B honor roll, they enjoy school, are happily active in the school extracurricular activities offered, and most importantly I and they have a peace of mind.

Without this scholarship, my kids will have to go back to attending public school in this county because as a single mother and the sole guardian I can not transport them to a public school in a different district. The closest school out of our district is an hour away.

I pray we find a solution to continue these scholarships for tuition to be able to give the kids that never would have a chance, a peace of mind everyday instead of the survival mindset.

Sincerely,

A mom just trying to help provide a better life for her children.

I am a 60yr old grandmother, raising 3 grandchildren and caring for my 87yr old father. My grands attend LOL School of the Arts. I have a M [REDACTED], 4th grade, P [REDACTED] 7th grade & C [REDACTED] 8thgrade. Last year my mornings consist of going to 3 different schools which was not an easy task. P [REDACTED] has experienced a challenging school life! He's below his average, and has always been placed in the classrooms with environments that were not helping him succeed in life. I received calls everyday concerning various situations with learning and behavior. I work fulltime, and it was draining! He was guilty of many thing, but he was accused of many things that were untrue. His previous years in public schools branded him of being unworthy for education. He was in a classroom where his peers had no goals, and no one was encouraging him to do better. His ability to read was extremely poor, is self confidence was at the bottom. He absolutely HATED school! I knew I had to get him out of there, or he would head down a road of distruction.

C [REDACTED], struggled with learning also, they missed out on the basics. He did not talk much, or socialize. Which was very concerning to me. Being in a large classroom he was simply ignored and being left behind.

M [REDACTED] has always been eager to learn, I felt she was not really being challenged. And many of her friends families did not have the same values, I was trying to teach her.

So here comes the opportunity to receive the scholarship. I applied and received funding for two. How excited and relieved to know my grands could attend the same school. And most important

a Christian school with a much smaller population. Since this schools became a part of our lives let me tell you what has happened. They absolutely love going to school! Grades have improved drastically, because of the smaller environment, with less distraction. And teachers that are constantly encouraging them that they can do anything. And they believe them and strive to do their best! There is no negative peer pressure, because they are being taught Christian love. P█████ has done an absolutely turn around just by changing environments. C█████ socializes with his peers and publicly will speak, which would have never happened without the encouragement from teachers & peers. M█████ is striving for Beta Club, and is excited to strive for good grades.

This school has been life changing for my entire family!! To receive that letter taking the scholarship away was devastating! I financially cannot afford it! I think it's a shame that the only way my grands can receive an education is in a harsh, environment that was not working for them. In the public schools you can't even teach Christian love, and I know that makes a difference. The issues I had to address are not present here. I realize this could change, but everyone that attends here want to be here. It's a safe, loving environment suitable for exceling! And seeing the change this has made in my grands life is evident. Children don't get to pick their parents, they have no input in who raises them. They have been giving this opportunity to do well, and they took advantage of it, and without notice it's been taken away! I do all I can to provide for them, and it's not easy, but witnessing them believe Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me is worth every step I make for them.

A grandmother in Hartsville

My family is one that is significantly impacted by the court's decision to deem ESTF unusable for private education during the school year.

We were very relieved to be awarded these funds this past spring. Our daughter had some trouble with bullying and feeling out of place in public school. She often came home with descriptions of pornographic conversations happening at school. If she tried to walk away or change the conversation, she would be shunned or made fun of. She was punched in the stomach multiple times, and I could not get her teacher or administrators to even respond to my concerns. If she stayed in public school I know these problems would be the normal at the middle school she is zoned for and I can't imagine it would be much better at any other public middle school in Greenville county.

My son was ok at public school, but I was not particularly fond of things he was exposed to due to lack of supervision.

Again, relief to send them somewhere safe. Somewhere with similar values that cares about young children exposed to sexual content, language, and bullying. Somewhere that takes those seriously. And now, after they have just acclimated to a new environment, made new friends, I'm supposed to do what? Quit my job so I can homeschool them? Well I guess then I'll receive other money from the government so I can stock my fridge.

A parent in Greenville

I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to be approved for the scholarship, which will help advance my children's educational experience. However, while I understand the current rules, I feel it's unfair that children are required to leave their home school and attend another school in a different district in order to utilize the scholarship.

My kids are currently in a public school, and I could use the scholarship to support their education through tutoring and other educational services. Unfortunately, some parents, including myself, face challenges in transferring our children to a different district, but we still have ways to use the funds at their current school.

I hope this policy can be reconsidered in the future to allow more flexibility for families like mine, so we can fully utilize the scholarship without having to move schools.

Thank you for your understanding and consideration.

If we pulled our student from the private school after we heard of the Supreme Court ruling because we couldn't pay the tuition moving forward and is now home schooling the student, would the estf fund pay for any home school tuition fees? Our public school is not a good fit for my child/student.

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to share the emotional and financial impact that losing the state scholarship to our private Christian school will have on our family. This scholarship has not only allowed us to provide a quality education for our daughter but has also

been a lifeline in ensuring that our son who has dyslexia would be able to attend Camperdown Academy with a large out of pocket expense.

Our daughter was enrolled at a public school for kindergarten. She was going to attend when we made the tough decision to enroll our son at Camperdown Academy. This scholarship was the deciding factor for us to leave her at Southside Christian.

For many families like ours, attending a private Christian school is more than just about academics. It's about being part of a community that reinforces the principles of faith, integrity, and character development, which we work hard to cultivate at home. This setting has been instrumental in shaping our children's worldview, helping them become not only intellectually capable but spiritually grounded. Our daughter attended Southside Christian for preschool and this scholarship allowed her to stay.

Losing this scholarship presents a harsh reality. The tuition costs of a private institution and a specialty school are often well beyond what many middle-income families can afford without significant financial assistance. Without the support of this scholarship, we would be forced to make difficult decisions that could affect not only our children's education but the overall financial stability of our household. This could mean cutting back on other essentials, sacrificing future savings, or even pulling our children out of a school that has become a second home for our daughter while her brother is at a different school for dyslexia. He is in the 5th grade.

But the impact goes beyond finances. For our children, this change would mean leaving behind friends, mentors, and a supportive learning environment that has become a vital part of their development. The thought of having to transition to a completely new school, with different values and expectations, is both daunting and disheartening.

In many ways, the scholarship has allowed us to give our children opportunities that we never had. It is incredibly difficult to face the possibility that we may no longer be able to provide this for them, simply because of financial constraints.

I hope that this letter sheds some light on the deeply personal and far-reaching effects of losing this scholarship. **It is not just an academic issue but a family one, affecting our children's futures and our ability to sustain the life we want for them.**

Thank you for taking the time to understand our concerns.

From parents in Greenville County

I am writing to you due to the disappointment of no longer receiving assistance for my granddaughter to attend an Independent Private School. She was privileged enough for her Aunt to help out last year with tuition due to [REDACTED] needing a school where she felt safe from bullying and needing teachers that were willing to help her succeed and feel safe. I am her Grandmother- she has been raised by me for several years now and I have watched [REDACTED] struggle for years in school(Public) due to bullying/low grades/failing and we were fortunate to find this school and have been very excited and pleased. [REDACTED] was very shy and not outgoing at all. She would cry and not want to go to school. The school officials(public schools) did not care about what was happening. Since starting LSSA she has been to school everyday except for the true sicknesses(Covid and Flu). She has done really well in her classes and wasn't afraid to ask the teachers if she needed any kind of help. She came out of her shell and was in her first year of cheer and chorus. She actually would get up and speak in front of people. She is now doing dual classes this year to get back to the grade she is suppose to be in. We are very proud of her. The director and staff have been amazing with these children and they need them so much.

We also have a financial problem with paying for the school if this assistance is stopped, she will not be able to attend and it will be a true loss to her education and well being. We are a family of 4(below the poverty level) and not financially stable enough to afford paying for her to attend and losing this chance would undoubtedly disrupt the progress that we have made with her attending this school. **In order to succeed we all need a chance for a great experience and education. These are the leaders of tomorrow. We should be lifting them up, not tearing them down.** The assistance being taken away will be very hard on all of these students. The financial hardships and wanting the best for our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews to succeed and not get left behind from not having a chance. Please reinstate the assistance for the sake of the children.

We are struggling with this decision and trying to figure out how to pay at this point because we want her to have the best possible education.

We are a recipient of the scholarship. I applied bc I felt the school our daughter was attended was failing our daughter. I didn't feel like they were teaching her on her level of learning. I applied for the school transfer because her home school had a F on the schools report card and my daughter was bullied and the school was slow to handling the situation. We were denied because they stated she could get everything she needed at her home school. My mom told me about the scholarship she heard about on the radio. I applied didn't think we wouldn't get it. We applied

for the free charter school is our area but was waitlisted again. I got an email that we were approved for the scholarship for her to attend a private school of our choice. I was happy to be able to put her in a school that she's has been doing great thus far. I would hate to uproot our daughter from her current school to send her back to her home school where she was being bullied and the school's report card is an F.

Whenever I first got the email in February saying that my children had been approved for the ESTF scholarship, I couldn't believe it. I wept for days out of happiness and disbelief!

The news was literally life changing for our family! I would be able to afford to send all six of my children to the school of our choice where they would be together, from 12th grade down to 4th grade. We were overjoyed! The school year began, and we were waiting on the invoice to be sent from the school for the first quarter so that I could submit it for payment at Classwallet. However, before this happened, I received the devastating news that tuition at private schools would no longer be covered. My children have been in class for over a month. They have friends, they are on sports teams. In July, I had my hours reduced at work and there is no possible way I will be able to afford to keep them at this school that they already love. What am I supposed to do now? **Our tax dollars are being spent to support public schools in South Carolina, but there is no school choice. Other states have school choice options, why don't we?** Please help me understand this. I am desperate to keep my children at the school where they are thriving, and I am shocked and saddened that such a program could be approved and handed out to parents/families, and then taken away AFTER the school year has already started. Please tell me there is another option for us.

I live in St. Matthews, SC and I have 5 kids in school right now. I had 1 already in private/religious school and the other 4 went to public school last school year 2023-2024. My oldest(16) was the only 1 at private school at that time due to him being in high school. We tried public school for him half of his freshman year and it just wasn't a place he wanted to be and be around the things that were happening at our local public high school which was Calhoun County High School. It was then announced that we could apply for grants for the other kids to use next school year 2024-2025 and we were so happy to hear this! So I applied for 3 of my children that were still at public school and that school was Sandy Run K-8. Right as I was in the process of waiting to hear back if we would be approved for the grant money, we had a situation with my 6 year old little girl at Sandy Run public school. The principal called, it was in March 2024, to inform me that a little boy had stuck his hand in my daughter's pants and asked her to show him her underwear. These are 5-6 year old children in her class so to hear this from a child that is so young doing this to my daughter was traumatizing for her and us as her parents. We

immediately went up to the school and no one would give us any other information than what happened. I understand they cannot tell you the child's name, but you could at least tell me if he will still be around my daughter after today's events. He should be expelled for his actions or removed from the class to a different class in my opinion but the school principals would not give me any of that information. So that day, we withdrew all 3 children attending Sandy Run K-8 and switched them to the private school my oldest son was going too. They made room for us to fit in my 3 children to finish out the 2023-2024 school year. Thankfully my family members helped me out with the tuition the rest of that school year. So then later that week I find out we were approved for tuition grant money for next school year for the 3 youngest and had a sigh of relief that I wouldn't have to borrow money any longer from family. Over the summer my step son (16) also comes to live with us and he is going to attend the private school as well. We had it planned out that we had his tuition covered and my oldest tuition covered and grant money would pay for the other 3 children. In total it is \$1,500 a month for all 5 children to attend this private school. Thankfully once school started we would only have to pay \$600 out of pocket due to the grant money for the other 3! Due to congress deciding to eliminate the use of the funds for tuition payments I will now starting in November have to pay the whole \$1,500 a month for the kids to attend the private school we are **going too. I was so sad and devastated to hear that we could no longer use that money for tuition. You can't tell someone something and offer us grant funds for tuition and then decide a quarter of the way through to change it. It's not right.** I would hope that Congress would at least let us use the funds to finish out this school year and use it for tuition that way no kid has to switch back to public school due to not being able to afford the private school that everyone switched their kids too. Public schools are so rough these days and i was so happy to switch mine to Wesfield Academy, the private school mine attend, due to its smaller with less kids. It's the same curriculum just smaller classes and the best staff work at this school as well. We couldn't be happier than we are now with the school the kids go too. I hope that Congress would change their mind to let us finish this 2024-2025 school year using those funds for tuition that way no kid has switched to a great private school and got settled in and will have to go back to public school due to parents not being able to afford it once November comes. Please I beg of you. **We are all struggling to figure it out. I am going to take extra hours at work. My husband is going to work overtime. My mom is trying to figure out how to help us come November when we can't use the grant money for the tuition. Please consider changing it back to let us use the funds for tuition until the end of this school year.** It will be much appreciated!

From a worried mother,

XXXXXXXXXX

Sumter

I believe that the sudden and drastic change to disallow the use of the ESTF is a huge disservice to the families of South Carolina.

A little background.... **I am the mother of 4 children, I am also a taxpayer, and a public high school teacher.** My oldest daughter excelled at everything and graduated from public school in 2021. My second born, my oldest son, struggled with school from the start. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and has struggled to with reading since the age of 3 when we first began trying to teach him phonics. He is a great talker and very articulate otherwise but has always fallen short in this academic area. He had a wonderful pre-k teacher and his Kindergarten teacher was absolutely amazing and understood him and how he needed to learn (she also suffered with ADHD). She made great progress with him while they were together, however, she moved before the end of the school year and he was assigned a new teacher. This did not help my already struggling student. Fast forward to 1st grade. Unknown to us at the time, he was being bullied at school. It is not what you would think just "kids being kids"; he was being bullied by his TEACHER. She would pick on him, threaten him, take photos of him 'off task' in the classroom. There were also occasions where she would take him into the classroom's restroom to berate and belittle him. He did not tell us these things when they were happening and therefore we were not able to address the situation. By the time he reached elementary school, 3rd grade, he had continued to fall farther and farther behind. By this time my 3rd child was also in school in 1st grade. School became a torturous environment for my son. He was being bullied by not only his classmates and fellow students but by some of the teachers as well. It was so severe that other students were even following him to the bathroom to pick on him and try to fight him. His father and I made the school aware of our concerns and what we knew of the situation but HE DID NOTHING. His only response was, "Well people picked on my when I was in school too."

One morning, just before Christmas/Winter break, I was dropping the kids off at school, starting with my oldest who was in high school at the time. From the time I stopped the car to let his older sister out, he begged me not to make him go to school. This ordeal went on for the next 15-20 minutes as I completed our normal drop-off routine. When I pulled up in front, of his elementary school, he was still begging, on the verge of tears for me not to make him go. I forced my tearful child out of the car and made him go into the building. As a parent, I was crushed. I spent the next hour or two checking into the private education offerings in my town (there were only two of them). I took applications and information for both schools and returned to the elementary school to sign my son out early for the day. When all of this took place I was out of work and the only income I had was unemployment benefits. After weighing our options, and discussing what could take place if we sent him back to a place of pure hell and torture, we decided on the less expensive private school (with an understanding that payment arrangements had to be made). The next day, I withdrew my son from the public schools of Williamsburg

County and enrolled him in private school. **This was not a decision that was made abruptly or on a whim. It is a decision that was made for the safety and well-being of my child.** I couldn't afford to wait around for him to become a danger to himself or others because of how he was being treated. He is now a high school junior and this thriving in school and has even started the process for dual enrollment into college courses.

We tried other schooling options over the course of his and his siblings' education and when I heard about this funding I was ecstatic. I knew that he would be able to finish out his education in a place that was good for him and that it would ease the financial burden that comes with private education. This funding allowed me to not only place my oldest son in a wonderful educational environment but also his two younger siblings (one of whom is also a struggling reader). I believe that the SC Supreme Court should reconsider this decision. **As a taxpayer and a functional working member of society I have no issues or qualms with my tax dollars going to support students that may need an alternative to public education. Furthermore, I believe that ALL students in South Carolina should have the opportunity to learn in the best environment for themselves and their families.**

A mother from Williamsburg County

The SC ESTF vouchers was a life line for my son and I. I had been searching for a school where he would thrive for quite sometime even without knowing how I would pay for it when I found the right fit so when we were granted the scholarship funds I was extremely happy and excited for the opportunities that would be available. My son is what is known as Twice-Exceptional , gifted but also has a special need/disability. He is continuously scores/ performs in the 99th percentile among his peers and is in Kindergarten scores were on 3rd-5th grade level in Math and Reading. He has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and also has a sensory processing sensitivity. I had been on the hunt for a school where he could learn on an advanced level but also grow socially with his peers. I toured many schools to find the best fit which would be schools with smaller class sizes that also understood/ could cater to the needs my special needs child/student. I quickly discovered such schools would be private and the cost was out of my reach. **When I found out the SC ESTF had been approved I quickly jumped on the amazing opportunity to apply. When I found out we were 1 of 5000 applicants approved I felt like I had won the lottery and things were looking up and headed in the right direction because I had been stressed about finding a school where my child would not just survive but Thrive!** Following approval, I went back and toured some of the same schools I had before and a few others I hadn't before because the cost was so far out of my budget, but now I had a change in availability of funds because I now had been granted the Trust fund scholarship to use toward my son's education. Even with the scholarship there were still

quite a few schools that were out of budget but I was definitely more hopeful that I was going to get funds to help cover a great deal of the cost and I would make other financial sacrifices to cover the rest in order to provide my son with an education suitable for his needs.

After choosing a school, I hadn't received the SC ESTF as of yet but the school year was quickly approaching and there were certain out of pocket expenses I was responsible for paying to attend this school. I paid for the application fee, enrollment fee, activity fee, purchased uniforms then had them embroidered with the school's logo, as well as required school supplies. All of the above were required before I received any scholarships funds which doesn't allow reimbursement to parents using the scholarships funds so this was a huge financial sacrifice/investment but worth it for the education my child would receive. I the first quarterly scholarship payment of \$1500 and I paid it directly to the school from Class Wallet. I felt a sense of pride about myself and gratitude to the State of SC for having such a program available for students like mine who needed those funds to be able to attend the school of their/ their parent's(who are tax payers) choice.

On the contrary, when I found out(initially through a facebook post of a fellow scholarship recipient) that the scholarship had been immediately eliminated, my heart sank and I immediately began searching the internet for proof because there was no way this could happen / be true! I searched google and there were only a few articles related to the court ruling and I hadn't received any related emails from the SC Department of Education as others on social media were saying they had received but sadly it was true. I immediately became stressed and went into panic mode. Everything that was going so right with the program and it seemed to crumble in an instant. I immediately began thinking about the how awful its going to be to have to take my son, who doesn't adapt to change/ transitions very easily, out of the school we worked so hard to find, where he has learned so much already, and adjusted so well and put him back into Public school. I also thought about how much time and money I had invested in finding a school and paying the various enrollment expenses and now that would all be going to waste because of the harsh ruling of the SC supreme court to snatch Education funds away from the children who's parents are tax payers as well, and deem it unconstitutional to use tax payers funds towards private education. The funds will no longer be available to use toward anything when these students are forced to go back to public schools, because students are unable to use the funds while attending public school. I believe the law makers and supreme court needs to reconsider this decision and allow funds to be used towards the education parents want for their children, even if its just for the rest of this school year to give caregivers time to sort things out without pilling children out of the private schools. **There are many other states that allow tax payers funds for private education so why not South Carolina?** The court believes the private schools will benefit / profit from the funds but in actuality the real true beneficiaries are the

parents and students who were counting on those funds to afford the education our students need and deserve!

Thank you for your time.

I am reaching out with our concerns of this matter. It has been very upsetting that my child who attends Bob Jones Academy will no longer receive the funds to cover for his tuition. We made due with what was given to us and now we no longer have the means to pay the rest of the year. We want the best education for our child to set him up for success and we feel we have been failed by you. We hope there is a way to somehow fix this or if you could provide resources to apply for financial aid.

A parent in Greenville

My name is J[REDACTED]. My husband's name is A[REDACTED] and our daughter is [REDACTED]. She is 5 years old and a 5K at Mullins Marion Christian school. We are 1 income family. This funding has been a true blessing for us. Our daughter needs extra help and she is getting that at this school, and is learning so much already. Learning to read, count learning to write in cursive. Also she attends the afterschool program here as well, which is also God sent for us as we only have 1 vehicle so my husband is able to pick her up from the afterschool program when he gets off of work.

Without the spending, we just don't know what we will do. Please do not take the funding from our family and all of these other families that it is such a blessing to. Thank you

A family in Marion County

Hey the decision about the tuition is messing with my choice to put my son in the school he goes to now to make it a choice to pay tuition then take it away is unconstitutional!! **and it it unfair to us how am I suppose to figure this out when I am myself in school and work at the same time ?**

The ESTF Fund has saved my children's life. I am an African American mother of 6 children. Three of which attend private school. Since enrolled at the schools they are making As and Bs, enrolled in extracurricular activities, and have more structure and assurance in their life. These factors are not only a great asset for my children, but for the community as well. My son who is 16 years old and is on the autism spectrum and has ADHD, Is now making very wonderful grades and his behavior has improved significantly. He focuses more and is able to do task better than before. We reside in Sumter SC , and with all the negativity within the community and surrounding cities. I am proud to say that being apart of the ESTF program has helped shape and save the lives of my children and many more. Thank You!



From a mother in Sumter

Our family like so many others have been devastated by the SC Supreme Court decision to end funding through the scholarship fund. We use this scholarship to help offset the cost of my son's tuition at Hope Academy. Hope Academy is the only option for us because Greenville county school district refuses to provide the services and therapies my son needs to thrive in school. **This unfortunately is not a choice for us but a necessity.**

From a mother in Greenville

Hello, my name is [REDACTED] and my granddaughter is five years old. She attends 5K at Mullins Marion Christian school. My daughter and her husband are a one income and a one vehicle family. This funding is a true Blessing for their family. [REDACTED], my granddaughter is getting so much from being in such a small classroom. She is learning so good and loves going to school. If this funding is taken away, we don't know what we will be able to do, please keep the funding for the school and for many other schools who are needing this funding for so many hard-working families who cannot otherwise have their children attend a private school and get, smaller learning environments thank you so much .

We are so desperately in need of tuition to be paid as we are behind on the payments due to the ESTF Supreme Court ruling. Please let me know what I need to do as the school is saying they can't offer me help. My kids love their new school and I do not want to pull them. They are finally thriving and getting the help they need


Good evening. It has taken me some time to really put into words how i feel about the recent Supreme Court ruling. I received the message of the ruling 4 days after a major eye surgery and have been scrambling, trying to figure out what we were going to do as a family. I am disabled due to a rare eye condition that is slowly causing blindness as well as a very unstable form of glaucoma. My child missed out on much needed socialization with children his own age due to my inability to drive and overwhelming anxiety that has been a result of the vision loss. My husband works 6 days a week and does the best he can. **Needless to say, this scholarship was a God send as my sons school is quite literally 2 minutes away from his work.** The smaller class setting has really benefited my son because i fear some of my anxiousness has rubbed off and large crowds are intimidating for him. He also struggles with some basic learning such as writing and i feel like he would get lost in the shuffle of a public school due to their large class sizes. While it would be amazing to continue to be able to apply for the scholarship for future school years i feel that at the very least we should be able to use the funds for the remainder of this school year as not to punish the student and to give parents more time to figure something out. **I don't understand the politics of it all but i do understand the human component and this has added more stress to an already stressful time with all the things that are going on as far as education goes.** Thank you for your time and the ability to be able to share our story.

Hello my name is [REDACTED] We reside in Spartanburg, SC. We were fortunate enough and I would consider my family blessed to have been able to receive ESTF funds for my 4 children. I have 7th, 5th, 3rd, and 5k students who have started their 2024-25 school year at Westgate Christian school. It has been a dream of mine to have my children in private Christian school and finally I knew this was our chance. I have family who reside in NC state and they have similar funding for private schools and I always wished we had something like that in SC. My children are so happy and daily tell me how awesome their new school is. My 7th grader even told me she wants to graduate from this school. Unfortunately not long into the school year we receive this devastating news of Courts ruling that we can not cover the tuition cost using the funds. **My children are broken and lost, not sure what will happen. They have been coming home these last few days and right away ask me mom do you have any good news? Do we have to go back to public school? Please say no. I don't know what to tell them.** These funds meant everything to us. How can I rip my children out from one school and move them somewhere else in the middle of the school year? They finally got used to their routine curriculum, schedule and teachers. I would love to keep my children in current enrolled school this full year. Praying this decision can get overturned and someone helps all of us who are affected by this decision. Asking for someone to step in and please please do something. We should have a choice where to send our children for education. We all pay our taxes and if I choose not to send them to public school I should be able to receive some funding for private or any other school that works best for my family. Thank you.

A mother from Spartanburg

I'm sending this email in reference to My granddaughter that I have custody of. She attends LOL Steam School of Arts in Hartsville, SC.

I was so Grateful that she was approved back in March of this year 2024. We Both were looking forward to a better future for her. In just a few short month and a 1/2 , she has come so far in alot of areas that she was lacking help with in regular school! I felt she was being left behind. She has been so happy that she has been able to even go to Private school. I Did not Ever think something like this would happen after she was approved for the Scholarship. Now, since it is said that tuition can no longer be paid this way, I probably will have to put her back in Public School and that is something that [REDACTED] & I do NOT want to happen. She has been continually excited about being at LOL STEAM. **She Loves school now!!** She is excited everyday to be able to go and also be a part of the soccer team. She is also doing Cheerleading and Track this year. Something that she wouldnt be allowed to do at regular public school!! She will be Heartbroken if I have to Pull her Out of school to put her back In Darlington County Public School System!! There academics are lacking in ALOT of ways!! They do not care about the child or there

grades. They said they are there to Love and Care for the children, nothing about really teaching them. I was looking for options when My niece was already going to LOL STEAM last year and that is why I was excited about trying to get her in with the scholarship. It was a tremendous Help!! I want her to have a future that she can and will be able to take care of herself in her future. She was not learning the things she needed to learn and already should have learned at the school she was in for K-2. LOL STEAM has given her in just a short time a lot of self confidence & self worth & she is very proud of the things she has been accomplishing since school started. This is so Heartbreaking if this no longer pays for tuition!! I really Hope that something can be changed to accommodate what we already thought she was promised and was going to be able to do. I Hope there is a way for her to continue to go to LOL STEAM. I personally can not pay out of pocket for her to go. I was recently taking care of my mother, so I had to leave my job. Now, I have  as well. My Mother unfortunately passed away!! Which we have been trying to remodel our home so we can get back in it!! This scholarship meant so much to us both and was the light in the darkest time, at the time she was accepted for this scholarship!! I Hope there is a way to fix this!! I do know that with God, All things are possible!! Please find a way for all of these kids to be able to go to school without the worry of having to leave the school they Love!

A grandmother in Hartsville

I have been hesitant to respond to the cancellation of the ESTF program. It is a sad day when scholarship money is offered and approved, just to be taken away, The court ruling stated taxpayer funds can not be used for private schools, but what public school has tuition? Lawyers should have reviewed the program before the tuition assistance application began, to avoid this type of disaster. There are families that were excited about their approval and their choice of schools that now have to make other arrangements or move the student to a public school. The choice was made to send our student to a Christian based school for the bible teachings, small classrooms and an environment where children are not subjected to bullying, but are given a foundation in the love of God, country and family. We believe these are the principles that every child should have instilled. **Our student has cardiomyopathy and we are comfortable with him being in a small school that is aware and has the dedication and time to watch him.** Our student is thriving in the school, therefore we know we made the right decision.

Starting kindergarten has been a big deal at our house and while I am trying to be understanding of all involved in this ruling it is going to be an even bigger deal if I have to pull him out of his school due to canceling his scholarship. He has established relationships, and understands his teachers expectations and rules. He's starting to read and has made such good progress in all

areas. I feel it's going to do a lot of harm to have to pull him and start somewhere else or homeschool him when that wasn't the expectation.

Like I said I have tried to be understanding of both sides and if it is ruled that the scholarship can't continue I just beg that you finish the year that's already started. For the sake of these young kids please don't halt progress mid year. His school has been a wonderful fit for his learning style and attention span. We went the route of this school though because we had the expectation of \$6000 to help pay tuition. I want school to be a good experience for him and for him to have a solid foundation of the basics. The upheaval of transferring to a public school is not conducive to that.

The South Carolina Supreme Court's decision to strike down the Education Scholarship Trust Fund program has been a significant cause of concern for our family. With a tight budget and modest salaries, it is crucial to us that our children receive an excellent education grounded in Christian values, as we recognize the importance of raising responsible future citizens.

I am very much disappointed and distressed about the court's decision to disallow this program especially after it has already begun..Doing so has put a financial burden on my family not to mention that it would be depriving my child of the opportunity to go to a school of choice that is beneficial to his needs. Shame on you!

I am a single dad of 5 kids... 2 sets of twins. I have 2... 8 yr old boys... I have 2 ... 5yr old boys.. and I have a daughter that is 4 yrs old.... and the public school system in Jasper county.....

You would not send your own kids to this public school in Jasper country Sc.

I get it ... it is free... but it is also an awfully terrible school.... fights... drugs... etc... the school system is terrible and the teachers are not good at all..

I put my kids in a private christian school because of our religion. And it gives them better education than what the public school would provide.

I need this money as a single father of 5 kids..

This was devastating to my financial needs... public school is free ... for a reason.... it is not as good in some area as others and Jasper county is way below average in the education level...

Politicians should allow their kids to go to this school system...

I bet they would never happen though

A father from Jasper

As the mother of a child who received the ESTF funding, I am affected by the SC Supreme Court's ruling. I am a single mother of two and about to graduate law school in December. This funding allowed me to be able to choose the education that fit my family's needs the best, while I continue my own education in an effort to better our lives.

I was thrilled that the funding was made available to get us through this last year of my academic journey to a law degree, and thankful that I will not need the funding beyond this school year as I will once again be gainfully employed. It was a relief to not have to use my student loans to cover multiple tuitions.

Public school is wonderful, and I support it wholeheartedly. I grew up in public school. Unfortunately, the hour and a half drive each way from our home and my school makes public school not an option. We could not get into the aftercare programs as they are quite limited in space, and I do not have family or extra care to help. I live where I can afford to live. Enrollment in our chosen school allows me to drop my children off at a safe place early enough to get to class and pick them up at a safe place after school.

The attached document is my written response to the Court's ruling. My opinion is just that, and the judicial opinions were heard. I don't disagree with the judicial process, on the contrary, it is the most interesting part of my education. How we choose to interpret words are the culmination of our experiences, education, and choices.

I feel blessed that my financial struggles are temporary and for the greater good of what is to come. **My heart is broken for the thousands of children whose futures are not as fortunate as my kids, even less so now. This decision took children who often feel instability in their homelife and potentially compounded the trauma by ripping away their ability to continue their education where their family felt most at home.**

Attachment:

Under Section 4 of Article XI of the South Carolina Constitution, the law is clear in stating that direct aid to religious or other private educational institutions is prohibited and further that no money shall be paid from public funds nor shall the credit of the State or any of its political subdivisions be used for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution.

SC has an ugly (not distant) past with redlining zones and keeping education inequitable and unattainable. Revisions to our Constitution in the 70s aimed to limit that, and I fully support the effort to support public schools and the right to quality public education for every child in our state. The drafters of those revisions envisioned keeping wealthy families from utilizing state funds and funneling that money into private schools, which further segregated the education system and intentionally kept low income and minority kids in underfunded schools. I wholeheartedly agree that public funds, which are accumulated through taxes, etc., are to benefit the public.

I also wholeheartedly agree that the SC Supreme Court got this absolutely wrong.

These funds were put into a trust, for the benefit of the SC child, not for the benefit of any private school, religious or not. This is evidenced by the choice of school that each recipient had (of which there were pages to choose from and of all types), including the ability to travel to a school outside of their zone. Those funds put the benefit directly to the child, through their parents, to choose the education that best met the individual needs of that child.

The funds are supported by the SC taxpayers, of whom every recipient family is and was required to show, through both legal residency and tax history to qualify. The SC ETSF gave SC children the opportunity to do exactly what the Constitution drafters envisioned 40 years ago-the ability to go outside of their district, or outside of the public school system, and to choose the type of learning that would benefit them, without the socioeconomic limitation that most families that are 200% federal poverty line otherwise faced and still face today.

Let's be clear, these aren't wealthy families with unlimited opportunities utilizing taxpayer funds to get a free ride through private school. These are families who historically have no choice in education, no ability to homeschool, likely have difficulty finding before and after school care and/or transportation, therapy, tutoring, supplies, the list goes on. These are the kids that benefitted from having an option for their education, because one size doesn't fit all.

These are the kids the drafters wanted to protect, and these are the kids the Supreme Court said no to this week.

I am a mother of three children ages 6, 9, and 10. I thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns and thoughts about the removal of the scholarship. First, I would like you to know a little bit about myself. I am an early interventionist working with children with special needs from birth to six years old. In this, I have seen enough to know how important the right environment and teachings early on is for children. I was raised by my elderly grandmother who struggled, but provided me with a wonderful and safe life. I had aunts and uncles who were able to help contribute to my education growing up. That is something I do not have now. When I found out about the scholarship opportunity that would allow me to choose the best school for my children I was ecstatic! Not to say all public school is bad, I felt they were in a good place where they attended East Elementary. But when my oldest had to move up, things got worse. She went from being the kid that loved going to school and thriving to one that hated having to go because of the atmosphere there. It seemed hard to discuss anything with the school and that certain things were trying to be kept under the rug so to speak. Using the scholarship I was able to send my children to a different school that felt more like a family. And since moving my children from the local public school to the private (only two options around), I have seen the severe difference between the two educations. They are all thriving and getting a quality education and enjoy school once more. I understand the supreme court ruled using the scholarship to pay for private school as unconstitutional. **As a taxpayer and citizen of this great state, using state funds to help a struggling mother provide the education she sees fit was a gift and an eye opener.** It was an opportunity that helped me realize that I only want what is best for my children. I have watched all of my children grow in just the last two months. **If I become forced to make them move now, I believe it will be detrimental to their education and mind-set right now.** I am a single mother just trying to do what is best for my children. I see change and transition issues through my job, and the devastation and regression it causes in children. I am kindly asking with the world today, to understand we are all struggling, but a difference can be made here. I want to add that I did not believe the scholarship to be unconstitutional. From what I read it disallowed state funds to be directly given to private schools. I do not see how that is happening here. **My children qualified for the scholarships to use toward their best educational interest. I saw that for their best interest, the private school in my area was the better route than the local school. That was a choice that I made to use the funds for.** The state did not tell me I had to use the scholarship to go there. Again the scholarship was for the benefit of my children's education, and now to take that away is like saying the state does not care about providing the best education possible for them.

Here are the specific issues I would like to address:

Inconsistent Messaging on Public Funds for Private Schools:

The email informing us that public funds could not be used for private schools lacked clarity and was poorly communicated. I understand there were challenges in rolling out this process, but South Carolina has shifted to a year-round school calendar, with many schools starting in mid-July. However, these funds were not made available until late August. How were parents expected to gather the necessary supplies for their children to succeed during the critical first weeks of school, which set the foundation for the entire year?

Transition Issues to Private School:

My boys were initially going to attend a private Baptist school in Aiken, First Baptist, which is on your approved provider list. All necessary documentation was submitted. However, due to the sudden halt in funding for private schools, my children had to remain in their zoned public school. At this point in the academic year, transitioning them to another school would be disruptive and impractical.

Misleading Scholarship Name:

The name "Trust Fund Scholarship" is misleading, as it does not appear to support private schools at all. This is false advertising, and I would urge you to reconsider the program's name to reflect its true purpose and scope

My child has been qualified for this program and has received funds. I was a little concerned that none of the private schools in our area would accept him because of his IEP and learning disability. SC Public School did him a great disservice this past school year and we were looking for a change. We were blessed to find an independent Christian School in nearby Augusta GA that accepted him but they did not qualify to receive grant money.

One of the things that I don't like about this program is that parents can't be reimbursed for services related to their child educational needs. We as a family pay over \$400/month out of pocket for speech therapy. This program should be able to assist with that, since we are SC residents, his therapy services are provided at Piedmont Hospital and it is directly related to his educational needs.

If the program is designed to assist families that wish to better the education of there children by choosing the best provider and/or schools that meets the needs of the child, the program should allow facilities such as Piedmont to invoice for services or allow for reimbursement.

Really disappointed that we can't use the funds for our children to have a choice of school in the county where we feel our beliefs and safety of our kids are a priority. I'm not aware of the reason why this decision was made but I feel that specifically now in this economy the funds would help my family and other families in the same situation to pay for tuition.

my 5 year old daughter was recently awarded the \$6,000 ESTF scholarship. **We chose a private school near my place of employment that's provides a wonderful learning environment for the children, and have teachers and staff that genuinely care.** Marley was just getting acclimated to the school, learning new things and meeting new friends when the Supreme Court decided to strip my daughter and 5 other families in this school of this opportunity . **We are tax payers as well and should be afforded the opportunity of school choice! My daughter is in Kindergarten and our neighboring public school does not have aftercare and resources.** She is 5 and has no one home to greet her or get her off the bus. Now I'm forced with having to find a Charter school close to my job who has space for a Kindergarten student. I cannot afford for her to stay at the school of choice without the assistance of the scholarship. This is a very detrimental decision that was made by the Supreme Court's and definitely affecting my working household! It's just not right to abruptly stop children's learning process mid school year and leave families making difficult decisions.

This is not fair for the child. We understand that next year would be understandable but start of the year.... Changing schools is devastating for him at 5 years old. I'm also a single parent.

Good afternoon to may it concern;

When I read the news that the South Carolina Congress had canceled the benefit of paying public school tuition, it was like a bucket of cold water fell on me.

At first I felt like my whole world was falling apart, that night my head was just spinning about how I would tell my children that the school they now loved, that they were already making friends, might have to move.

When I found out about this benefit I was so happy because I would have the opportunity for my children to go to a school that was not so much better than the public one but one that did go with our religious principles. I have 3 children, the oldest is a Senior at Bluffton High School and I know it is one of the best for offering college level programs but balancing it with our Catholic beliefs has been difficult for him. So when this opportunity came and knowing that they would help us pay tuition for the next 3 years, I did not hesitate to apply, I think I was one of the first to apply, I can say that the process was not easy but I finally did it . I never doubted that I wanted a Catholic school for my children but the cost prevented me from doing so. Knowing that I would have \$6,000 plus the help that the school would offer gave me the security that I could pay the rest so that in the end I could give my children an adequate first-class school with our religious values.

Now having this insecurity of not knowing why after starting school they now change their minds without keeping in mind how difficult it is for families and especially for minors who are changing schools is not healthy for them. At least they should honor this year to at least have the opportunity to talk to our children or give parents the opportunity to have more time to plan for the next school year.

I truly hope to God that they can reconsider their decision, I know that Congress wants a future generation to be the best and for that we need better young people and it will only happen with first-class schools with values towards others.

Now I am a mother who doesn't know what to do, my salary is not enough and I will have to change my children to a different school.

A mother from Bluffton

To the governor and lawmakers of South Carolina rejecting the grant funding for my daughter to go to private school has been detrimental to my mental health. **As a single mother who went to college to make a better life for herself, I earned my degree and started my career field, only to be deemed disabled soon after that.** I live in a county where the public system academia is a minute fraction of what it was when I went to school. The fundamentals like social studies were not taught at my daughter's public school last year. Science was taught for six months because there were not enough teachers to teach each core curriculum. And the ones these schools do employ are often not native English speakers, and this creates many barriers in learning for elementary education students. I chose private school education for my daughter because it's a better quality education and the grant took the financial burden off of me as a

single disabled mother. **Taking the grant away after the school year has begun is a travesty to my daughter.** She's learning a lot more and she's adapting well to her new environment. **Now I'm forced to choose between keeping a roof over our head and food on the table or keeping her in private school to cultivate her educational potential.**

I am deeply disheartened by the recent court decision and its profound impact on our family and many others. This ruling feels like a disservice not only to the families directly affected but also to the students who are now facing significant disruption in their education.

The timing of this decision, at the end of the first quarter, is particularly concerning. The sudden need for students to switch schools will undoubtedly create a heavy burden on public schools, which may be ill-equipped to handle this influx of new students mid-year. This disruption could lead to overcrowded classrooms and strained resources, negatively affecting the quality of education for all students.

Additionally, private schools that previously provided essential options and support for many families will now face financial strain. The loss of funding and students will have a ripple effect, potentially leading to staff reductions and diminished educational resources.

I want to share my story to help illustrate the real-life consequences of this decision. **It is crucial that decision-makers understand not only the immediate impact on families but also the broader implications for the education system as a whole.**

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and for your efforts to find a solution.

It was such a blessing to get the scholarship funding to allow my kids to be able to go to the school of their choice. My kids were able to go to charter schools last year but were not enjoying their new schools. They wanted to go to a Christian school but it wasn't even an option with tuition so expensive. With the scholarship we were able to send them despite a significant sacrifice for us. The scholarship didn't cover the entire cost of tuition and we still had to buy clothes, books, and other expenses.

They have been enjoying their new school so much. If the ruling is not changed, I will have no choice but to remove my kids from school and probably have them home schooled. They will be so disappointed. I still can't believe this happened, especially after one month of school. I am

praying that everything is being done to help my kids finish out their years at the school of their choice.

A father in Greenville

I am sending this email in response to the recent decision of the ESTF scholarship no longer applying to tuition.

My son attends Calvary Christian Academy in Williamston, SC. He started kindergarten this year and has been going to school there since 3K. Public school wasn't really something we wanted to do for many reasons, but paying for private school isn't something that is in the budget for us, and I'm sure a lot of other families in this economy. So we were so thankful when we found out about this scholarship. Our son (and daughter who is in 2K) can attend a school that our family absolutely adores. A school that feels like family. All the teachers know who he is and loves him. He has 9 kids in his class and that is unheard of in public schools. But the main reason we love it and prefer it over public schools is because they are able to teach the kids about God. They attend chapel once a week and have daily Bible lessons. God is very important in our family and to be able to continue that in school and can rest easy knowing that the teachers share the same values. If he were to go to public school that would not be the case.

It's very unfortunate that this decision has been made and I truly hope that the appeal goes through. I understand things happen, but I definitely think that the least you can do is let the scholarship continue through this school year so the kids (especially kindergartners) don't have to be transferred in the middle of the school year. Many families I'm sure have the same opinion as my family.

I know that God has his hand in this situation and I pray for the best outcome. Thank you for your time reading this email.

A mother in Williamston

It is my fundamental belief that the main focus of the school should be to teach our children in a way that it benefits them and their way of learning course material. In today's society our children are not safe nor are they happy. While the school system tries to focus on academics, it fails to take into consideration the mental health aspect of it all. I believe the question we should be asking is why so many parents are opting for this grant and why so many are choosing to

remove their children from the public school systems. We just want what's best for our children and their education and it starts with a safer environment. This grant has changed my son's life for the better and I hope he will continue to have the opportunity to thrive because of it.

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a single mother of 7 kids. Right now, I have five children: three in elementary school, one in middle school, and one in high school. Yes, I do have two autistic children. **I removed them from the public school because the institution is unable to meet their IEP requirements. I'm in a terrible place right now without this money.** Meaning that in addition to finding another school that could meet my children's needs, I might also have to pay the school \$450 for each student in order to terminate them early. I just cannot afford to pay that. My children's education is very important to me; therefore, it was difficult to locate a school that could accommodate all of their demands. However, at The Rose of Sharon, I was able to do that.

A mother in St. Matthews

[REDACTED]

Parent of [REDACTED]

Attends the Mullins-Marion Christain School

I want to give a little introduction to myself and my daughter. I am a single mother, I work, I attend school myself, and I am independent. Now my daughter is eleven and I saw earlier this year that South Carolina was offering a scholarship fund for parents like me to send their child/children to a school of their choice. I was like yes, finally my prayers had been answered. Alyssa was struggling at the public school here in my town of Marion, South Carolina, she was not getting the education she deserves from the interruptions of other children's teachers being out and sub teachers coming in and out. The classrooms being overcrowded too so the teachers can't teach every child. Also, the no child left behind act that has let my child fall way behind for to be learning at a 2nd grade level instead of a 6th grade level where she needs to be. Now I am not saying this is just one person's fault, it is our school system. When I go on the site and filled out the application for my child to receive the funds to go to any school and she was approved I did not care about the exact amount of funds and what the extra choices were like extra help or supplies I was just grateful that I was going to get help with tuition. **Then for them to just come**

behind all of us parents' backs and the schools for they had to put in an application too was a breach of contract. For them to snatch it away without notice of any kind was downgrading. Like we meant nothing to them, our children mean nothing to them. Oh, but hey you can still get the money, but you can't use it for the number reason us parents need it for our children's future our children's education, that for once in six years my daughter is getting good grades. She is excited to go to school instead of dreading going to school.

I say all that to answer the questions you have sent us; **I would make a video, but I get really emotional when I talk about my child and her future, I just want the best for her and to have an actual chance of making something for herself.**

First question: How does the decision by the South Carolina Supreme Court impact your family? It impacts my family terrible because without that fund I will have to either find a second job, or Mortgage my house to afford to send her, or put her back into Marion public school where she will have no chance of a future.

Second question: Why is it important for your child to participate in this ESA program?

To me it is very important because it helps me put her in a school that has the ability to actual teach her in a controlled way and quite learning where she can grasp all she can that they have to offer to her.

Third question: Tell us about your child? She is a very outgoing person but struggles badly in school. The school system two years ago even put her in the epi system to help pull her grade level up.

Fourth question: What were your expectations for your child as they were starting a new school year and taking advantage of the ESA program?

That she was going to grow and learn as she Deseves, she was going to be going to a school that could take the time and teach her what she needs for her future and put her on the level she needs to be to succeed. I was so filled with joy when we got approved so I could have the chance to advance her where my mother could not advance me, and I was let down by our public system.

Fifth question: What do you do now? Where does this leave your family? Well right now all I can do is fight for them to give us back what we were approved for and if not then I am lost for I will have to put her back into public school or home school.

Sixth question: What is your message to lawmakers/governor?

My message is why would you give us parents and schools this scholarship to wave Infront of us then say oh never mind you can't have this to pay your child's tuition, but hey you can by a tablet or laptop or some supplies but not send them to a great school. You brought this to us, and it was like a prayer answered, for you to make it a nightmare that just turned all of us into despair and heartache. We were actually grateful to have the help that most of us much need. I know it is not their problem that we are struggling and wanting the best for our children and their future so hopefully they do not have to struggle when it is their chance to take the reins. We as parents just want a fighting chance and you gave that to us for all of a month then to take it away without us having a say is a breach of trust and contract and all in all just a sly and unhuman way to just push us back down where you think we should stay and to heck with trying to help us give our children a better look on life and furture.

I am currently a recipient of the ESTF in South Carolina. I am a single Mother of an amazing six-year-old boy named [REDACTED]. He is the absolute joy of my life in every way possible. I believe it is my job as a mother to give him the best opportunities available during his youth, so he has the tools to be a productive member of society later in life. This covers many facets of our lives from religion, manners, respect, equality and of course education. Unfortunately, being on a single-family income, I often must find unique ways and do my research to financially afford the tools I need. Unfortunately, I do not qualify for federal or state assistance. After a referral from a friend, I absolutely fell in love with Holy Trinity Classical Christian School in Beaufort SC. We applied and registered for the pre-k program and were blessed to be accepted and given a scholarship to cover some of the tuition from the school. Once [REDACTED] started with the pre-k program, he blossomed in so many ways. His love of education, learning and lessons on God grew each week. With the small class size averaging 10 students to one teacher and teacher assistant, I knew although it might be hard financially it was something I had to do. He no longer wanted to learn-he craved it. Even with the school scholarship I had to work with the tuition department to make the monthly payments.

Knowing the tuition cost increased significantly for kindergarten and grade school continuing [REDACTED]'s education at HTCCS would not be possible. I had reluctantly started scoping out public schools when one of his teachers told me about the ESTF fund. Immediately I started doing my research and the second they started accepting applications I applied (literally online at midnight waiting for the application process to refresh on the website). I was over the moon excited when we were awarded the \$6k.

Holy Trinity is more than just a school, it's family. Receiving pictures throughout the school year from his teacher, having his pre-k teachers on site for the first day of kindergarten to make

the students feel more comfortable, being able to reach out when something is wrong even if its not directly about school are just a few of the small things Holy Trinity provides for us. Last year [REDACTED] had a few rough days of not wanting to go to school, I reached out to his teachers, they arrived the next school day early to meet with me and we came up with a plan together to help [REDACTED] get through it. When [REDACTED] was in prek3 we decided that he would benefit from speech therapy. [REDACTED]'s teacher took it upon herself to check in with his therapist every week and let her know where she saw improvements and where she thought we might need to work harder. That's more than being a teacher, that's being family. I would not get this from any other education providers in my area – public or private. Knowing that when I drop my son off every morning that he will be taken care of in so many ways makes my heart smile. They say it takes a village and Holy Trinity is a huge part of my village.

Did you know that almost every graduating senior in years past has been awarded college scholarships at HTCCS. Do you know how big that is for a single mom. My \$25.00 each paycheck savings account is not going to go very far by the time [REDACTED] is ready for college. **Without the ESTF scholarship I would not be able to afford tuition for [REDACTED]. Sending him to another school would not only halt his education but it would progressively reduce what he has learned, not to mention the mental anguish it would cause. On behalf of myself, all the other single Mom and Dads, all the middle-class families looking for a hand up and not a handout and all the parents who want to be able to provide the best education for their children I beg of you to re-consider your ruling. Our children deserve the best education.**

A mother in Beaufort

A letter to Jazlyn

I have sat down several times to write this out, but I keep returning to a place where my thoughts are so jumbled I can not get my words out on paper. My sweet Jazlyn. I am heart broken, and left without words. You see, it took us months to convince you that school would be something magical..a safe place, where you could learn. A place that you would feel comfortable. I know that you were scared...and don't handle change well. You have just started your educational journey, Kindergarten. You have done so well with this new journey, but I'm afraid that we have to rip you away from the very start of your schooling foundation. The classroom you're now comfortable in, the new friends you've made...and your teacher- you'll have to say goodbye because the grant you received is being ripped away without warning. I feel like as a parent, I have failed you.

So you see, sweet Jazlyn, mommy has failed you, because you have to say goodbye to the only classroom you've known, the teacher that build your trust and the school you feel safe in....because I laid trust in our governing state of South Carolina, that I pay taxes in, to continue to fulfill the promise of your awarded grant.

Appeal for the Abrupt Revocation of Education Grant

I am writing to express my profound disappointment and heartbreak over the recent decision to revoke the education grant that was awarded to my daughter, Jazlyn, for her kindergarten year at Calvary Christian Bible School. **This decision has left our family in a state of financial uncertainty and emotional distress, and I respectfully ask you to reconsider the immediate impact this is having on families like ours.**

Jazlyn just began her educational journey. She has always been a child who struggles with change and thrives in smaller, familiar settings. After months of encouraging her, we were finally able to convince her that school would be a magical and safe place where she could feel comfortable to learn and grow. With that, we enrolled her at Calvary Christian Bible School, a place where our family feels aligned both spiritually and academically.

The joy we felt when we received the grant award for Jazlyn was indescribable. After years of struggling to pay for private education for our eldest daughter, we saw this grant as a divine blessing, especially given the financial strain we've endured due to health issues and the economy. We had made significant sacrifices to keep our daughter in the school, and the grant seemed like the answer to our prayers.

Now, with the revocation of the grant, we face the daunting prospect of uprooting Jazlyn from the only classroom and teacher she knows, just weeks into her kindergarten experience. I can only imagine the confusion and fear this will cause her as we navigate this unforeseen change. Public school is not a viable option for Jazlyn due to her unique needs, and had we known the grant would be revoked, we would have pursued a homeschool co-op to provide her with the individualized attention she



requires. However, **we were not given the time or opportunity to prepare for this sudden change.**

The recent court ruling, which struck down the Education Savings Trust Fund program, has left us and many other families in an incredibly difficult position. We understand the legal complexities surrounding the decision, but it feels deeply unjust that families who were already awarded funding are now left in limbo. We pay taxes that support a public education system we do not use, and we receive no assistance through other public benefits, such as free meals or summer EBT cards. **We've always managed on our own, but this sudden loss of support has left us without options.**

I urge you to consider the immediate impact this decision has on families like mine. We trusted in the promise of this grant and planned our children's education around it. It seems unreasonable to pull already awarded funds in the middle of the school year, especially without giving families the time to make alternative arrangements.

Please reconsider the timeline for the grant's revocation or offer some form of transitional assistance for families who, like ours, had already counted on this support for their children's education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah 

A mom from Myrtle Beach

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:12 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Use of Public Funds for Private and Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

Honorable Members of SC Education Committee:

I want to express to you my opposition to the use of public monies, by any means, to fund private or religious schools. I am an avid supporter of public schools and am glad to support them with my tax dollars. However, I am adamantly opposed to having my taxes used to fund private or religious schools. Please consider my thoughts when you meet to discuss this topic.

- Voters support public schools. About **90% of South Carolina's parents prefer to send their children to public schools.**
- **Vouchers and scholarship programs in other states have sent most of their funds to families whose children were already attending private schools.** Although these programs were originally promoted as options to help students from poverty, experience in other states has shown that the **majority of parents who have benefited from Educational Scholarship Accounts and similar programs have not been families from poverty,** but rather families who were already sending their students to private schools.
- Educational Scholarship programs and vouchers are **not accessible to most families in rural and low-income communities** because few private schools serve rural communities and because the funds that have been offered for private school expenses are not sufficient to cover tuition plus other requisite expenses, such as transportation and meals.
- Disbursing public funds requires public accountability. Lawmakers are accountable for responsible use of public money, and any **private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools.** These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.
- Private schools can discriminate against minorities. Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. **Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups.**
- Public schools rely heavily on tax funding to operate. **Diverting funds to private schools would strain public school budgets, leading to larger class sizes, reduced programs, and other negative impacts on the quality of education.**

Sincerely,

Erin Averette
Anderson, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:13 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School funds

[REDACTED]

I do not believe that public funds should be used for private schools Susan D. Coomer Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:17 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships

[REDACTED]

Dear committee members:

With regards to committee action to consider additional support to private or religious schools, I wish to voice my concerns. Our public institutions are where the majority of our state's families send their children for education. Private and religious schools set their own admission requirements and tuition. It is unlikely that any financial support the state would provide would change the economic demographics of children attending those schools. It would only reduce the financial impact to those who can already afford to send their children.

Our public institutions are underfunded and would greatly benefit from additional funding, especially in some of the poorer areas of our state. When funding is distributed to affect those in the lower economic brackets, it benefits us all. Public institutions are required to provide data on the use of these funds. Private and religious institutions are not.

Our state representatives and senators are accountable to the voters. And this voter wants to see an accounting of the use of our tax dollars. Funding for private and religious institutions is throwing our tax dollars into a black hole.

Connie Hayes

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:19 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: potential voucher legislation concerns

[REDACTED]

Dear South Carolina Senate,

As a parent of three children born and raised in South Carolina, I am concerned about the possible voucher legislation.

I see value in protecting funding for public schools that serve every student. With a voucher program, I worry about the inadequate access for students with disabilities and from lower-income homes that we see in other states: although 4.3% of U.S. children, over 5% of American Indian, Black, and multi-racial children, and 6.5% of children living in poverty (per U.S. census 2019 data) have disabilities, only 1.5-3% of kids receiving vouchers in other states have disabilities.

If you propose voucher legislation, please ensure access for all, including students with disabilities and from lower-income homes (e.g., income caps seem logical). Also please ensure that schools that receive public funding through vouchers are held equally accountable as public schools.

Your constituents are trusting you to write sound policy that truly serves SC children, not just a select few.

Thank you for your service.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Duda
parent, resident, taxpayer, voter
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:35 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Education Funds Belong in Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

I wanted to reach out to you today to stress the importance of keeping education funding in public schools only.

While the idea of vouchers sounds great, the complete lack of oversight of private education makes this completely flawed. There is absolute zero accountability for the millions of dollars that are planned for this program.

Originally, Senator Massey stressed that this program would ensure students with IEPs could get into private schools. However, Senator Massey also refused to include language that private schools could not discriminate against students with disabilities.

Another factor is the lack of transportation for private schools. This program was pitched as a way for lower SES families to afford the private school experience. However, many parents would not be able to transport their children to and from school, let alone pay additional fees not covered by tuition.

When the lack of accountability, the carte blanche to discriminate, and the lack of transportation and other services are taken into account, this program is exposed as a way for public money to be funneled into private businesses, award free money to parents who already have their children in private school, and strip away educational funding support for students in our public schools, degrading the ability to attain a high quality public education.

Thank you for your time.

Julie Prommasit.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:36 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Money Should Go to Public Schools

[REDACTED]

Dear SC Senate Education Committee,

I'm writing to express my view that public money should not be diverted to private schools. A strong public education system is important for sustaining an educated and informed populace that in turn benefits our state on many levels. When public money is diverted to school vouchers, private scholarships, and such, it starves public schools and benefits wealthy families who already send their children to private school, whereas rural and low-income families either still can't cover tuition after vouchers or don't have private schools in their communities. Further, public money should not go to schools that aren't accountable to the public and don't serve all taxpayers equally.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Provost
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:38 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Education

[REDACTED]

Me, my family and the organization that I am proud to lead want to go on record opposing diverting public tax dollars to private schools. Those schools are a choice some families can make but we CANNOT blur the foundational premise of our country, the separation of church and state. And certainly you have no reason to do any such thing until our schools are at TOP of the states' quality list and not near the bottom.

Move our schools UP that list and make us proud. Divert public tax dollars to private (often FOR-PROFIT) entities and bring shame and disdain on SC... not to mention unending and expensive lawsuits.

Doris A. McLallen, president
American Association of University Women:
South Carolina

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I have the distinct honor of serving as principal of Divine Redeemer Catholic School in Hanahan. Divine Redeemer is unlike many of the Catholic schools in the Charleston area. We are a mission school, embracing many underserved students from Berkeley and Charleston county. My families are hard working people who want only the best education, both academically and spiritually, for their children. They make huge sacrifices to afford tuition, despite the fact I distribute an average of \$80,000 a year, nearly 10% of my budget, in financial assistance.

I have been praying for the ESTF program to come to fruition as I have had many difficult conversations with parents who want nothing more than to have their children here at DRS, yet simply can't afford the tuition. Their children are often overlooked in the public school, evidenced by the large number of students who come to me in 3rd, 4th, 5th...even 7th grade, struggling academically, only for us to discover they have a learning disability that has gone undiagnosed for years. My school's smaller setting, dedicated and professional teachers, and caring staff make all the difference in the lives of these children!

Just a year ago, when we learned we would be able to begin the ESTF application process with families in our community, we were overjoyed. We worked tirelessly ensuring we had everything needed to invite more families to join our school. There were endless hours spent on creating forms in both Spanish and English, speaking at church Masses, meeting with potential families and, most importantly, guiding each family through the challenging application process. Our Family Outreach Coordinator worked tirelessly to help families understand the information being requested, gather all the data, and complete the application process. Once the acceptances began coming in, we worked to put all the necessary resources in place. I am so proud to say we welcomed 30 new students in August of this year.

Please indulge me for just a minute as I share a bit about some of our new students. We were thrilled to retain 90% of our 4K First Steps students and we have the strongest kindergarten class I've seen here at DRS. My typical retention rate from 4K to kindergarten averages 50%. The work accomplished through the 4K program and my highly effective lead teacher set up our youngest students for incredible success. My kindergarteners, 70% of whom are ESTF recipients, are now set for success!



One of our ESTF students joined us in fifth grade this year. The student is performing significantly below grade level, struggles to read at a second grade level, and is the sweetest, most positive student I've met. This student's mother shared her joy when a paper came home where the student had written his full name...something she had not seen her child do before. And he is in fifth grade! Just four months into the school year, this student is slowly, but surely, closing the academic gap. This student is more confident in attempting new skills, even mastering long division! Finally receiving the intensive academic support needed, this student will continue to thrive.

I had another conversation with an older ESTF recipient who wanted to go back to his other school. When we talked about it, he said he wanted to go back because he was smart at his other school. As we talked about his struggles here, it was clear he was struggling with the higher expectation and with grade level work. After our Fall MAP testing, we learned he is reading almost two years below grade level. He is closing the gap through hard work and additional support. However, imagine if he remained at his public school and the academic gap grew larger and larger. Research shows 3rd/4th/5th grade are critical years for developing the important "read to learn" skills imperative for future success. He IS a smart kiddo, and we will assure he reaches his potential, working at or above grade level.

Imagine the heartache I felt when I heard about the Supreme Court's decision on September 11. I have 30 students, nearly 20% of my school population, now facing an uncertain future. I was absolutely devastated. My first thought, after emailing Michael Acquilano, was no student would be leaving our school. These students need us, they deserve to be here, and I knew we would find a solution. Education is the key to success. Literacy rates have a direct correlation to poverty level, and our mission is to break this cycle! I've had numerous conversations with parents who share their own lack of education or inability to read. They understand how their children have not been served in the public school and truly want more for their children. The ESTF scholarship affords these families the opportunity to help their children succeed.

The ESTF program is critical to the families you serve. The program you have developed is meant for the most vulnerable children, for the most underserved children, for the families we serve here in the Hanahan and North Charleston area. The ESTF program very successfully identified families in need and awarded scholarships to students most in need.



A parent should have the right to choose where their child is educated, and it should NOT be based on zip code or level of income. Public schools are a good solution for many, but not all, students. Public schools are overcrowded and students can easily fall through the cracks. All parents should be able to choose any school that meets the academic needs of their children, whether it is public or private. With the ESTF program, the state of South Carolina extends this choice to the families most in need of assistance.

Please continue to fight for the rights of parents to pay nonpublic tuition. Let's break the poverty cycle, one student at a time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Beth Martyn
Principal
Divine Redeemer Catholic School



12/06/2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you with a request on behalf of my family. My name is Maria Valenzuela; I have 4 children who benefited from the ESTF program. For my husband and I, it was always a matter of consideration to have our children in a private school, specifically of the Catholic denomination, since it is the religion we practice. In public schools, there are many limitations regarding faith. In addition, we have always felt our children need more academic direction, as 2 require school accommodations and small groups benefit them.

I consider the public school system in South Carolina to be very good, but simultaneously, it has many limitations due to the large number of students in the schools. During the past school year, many situations occurred in my children's schools, leading me to look for another educational alternative. We witnessed bullying, fights, and even suicide, situations that, from my perspective, were not seriously addressed, and as a parent, that worried me.

When I heard about the ESTF program, I saw it as an excellent opportunity for my family to take my children to develop in a healthier environment and receive a better academic education. Due to the financial barrier, this opportunity had never been in our possibilities before.

My four children benefited from the scholarship, and from the first week of classes, I noticed the change in them. After 5 months, I can say with certainty that the education they are receiving now at Divine Redeemer School and Bishop England High School (in the case of my oldest daughter), is the best. Not only because I see their progress in the academic areas, but I see the personalized attention they receive, teachers genuinely concerned about their development and very attentive to their needs. In a few words I could not be more pleased with the change I see in my children compared to their previous school.

I cannot imagine having to take this great opportunity away from them because we do not have the economic resources to cover their tuition. It feels very unfair that after

giving us this great opportunity, from one day to the next, it is taken away from our hands. We are left with the uncertainty of not knowing what to do to keep our children in the school that we consider the best option for them, but with the concern of how we will cover their tuition.

In this letter, I beg your consideration for so many families, like mine, who made changes to provide a better education for our children (long distance transportation, cost of supplies and uniforms, etc.).... Families that are not satisfied with the convenience offered by the public system (free education, transportation, and other services). We know those are huge benefits, but also represent for us many limitations and concerns, such as those mentioned above.

Each family deserves the opportunity to decide the best educational option for their children, considering each child has different abilities and needs. The ESTF scholarship offered us this opportunity, and from the bottom of my heart, I pray that you can be the voice of our ESTF families and advocate for our children's right to receive the best education. I pray to God that this scholarship will continue to be a possibility for our children, and I pray that those who have the power to make this possible will see the great opportunity that is being taken away from these children and fight for them.

Thank you very much for your attention to my words, and I remain confident that you will fight for my children to continue receiving the education they deserve.

Sincerely,
Maria Valenzuela

Dear Committee,

[REDACTED] is our 5 years old kid and attends kindergarten at Divine Redeemer Catholic School. We were very excited about the scholarship that our son [REDACTED] received this school year, as it is a great financial support for our family economy. For us it is absolutely necessary to have this financial support, so that he can stay at his School. We do not want to look for alternatives just because of money...our son loves his school, and we are very happy with the attention and love that he receives there. We know that not only academically he is receiving the best education but also the love he receives is what makes us want him to stay in this school. We ask for your consideration in making it possible for our son and his friends to stay at Divine Redeemer through the ESTF program.

Thank you for your kind help and consideration,

Respectfully,

Belem Hernandez Leynes

My name is Miriam Garcia, I am the mother of a 16 years old boy and a 5 years old girl. My daughter is currently in kindergarten at Divine Redeemer Catholic School. She loves her school and everyone there is like her second family.

However, this school year has been one of uncertainty since the ESTF program stopped allowing the use of funds to cover tuition expenses in private schools. We didn't think it was good to take her out after being settled in her group, but at the same time the current economy and inflation make it impossible for us to get extra money to keep the children in private schools.

I would like to speak to you from my Christian Faith in which we have as our first commandment "Love God and your neighbor as yourself". I think that not only in Christianity we should practice it, but also before the law. I ask you to LOVE these little ones, to LOVE their innocence, and their dreams... because they are our future doctors, teachers, lawyers and why not? Members of the Senate, the Congress, the Court! And they will know and remember the noble people who made it possible for them to study and be happy in "The School They Loved".

Thank you for your consideration and attention to our petition.
Miriam Garcia

Testimony for ESTF Hearing:

I am the mother of [REDACTED] a student beneficiary of the ESTF program. This year we had the privilege and opportunity for [REDACTED] to study at Divine Redeemer Catholic School. So far, we have observed that it is an excellent school and exactly what we want for him. We have noticed great progress in our son, not only academically but also emotionally and spiritually. At school he is not only receiving a great education, but also reinforcing the values and beliefs we instill in him at home... In our experience (our other children graduated from public schools), that is not possible in the public system.

The ESTF program was a great blessing for our family, as it allowed us to pay [REDACTED] tuition. Now that the scholarship is limited and we cannot use it for this purpose, not only my son, but our entire family has been affected. I beg you to take a moment to think as a parent. It is not fair that, after having the great opportunity to choose the education we wanted to give our child, that opportunity is taken away from us. It is very unfair to take that opportunity away from my son because I do not have the financial resources to cover this unexpected expense... resources that in my opinion belong to him anyway, because we work very hard to pay our taxes. I sincerely hope that you can advocate for all affected families and make it possible for our children's education through the resources offered by the ESTF program.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

Josefa Hernandez

To
Education Committee

I, Bethna Lozada, representing student [REDACTED], from Divine Redeemer Catholic School, hereby express my great concern due to the sudden news that the scholarship that was awarded to my daughter can no longer be used to cover her 2024-2025 school tuition. **It was already planned in my annual expenses that tuition would be covered, and at the present time I do not have the funds required to pay the tuition by myself. Also taking into account that the public schools in the area where we reside no longer have spots for new students due to the high volume of students enrolled there.**

It is a very complicated scenario for us, that we consider unfair, especially since we applied for these funds for that educational purpose. If the funds cannot be used for the purpose for which they were provided, even spending all the money in other educational resources won't eliminate the huge burden we have over us since that decision was made. **In my opinion, there is nothing more important for any human being than their academic formation, and we as parents should have the option to freely choose the education we want to offer our children.** The ESTF program offered us this opportunity and it would be devastating for my family to have to take this opportunity away from my daughter. I beg you to reconsider the decision to allow families to pay tuition at private schools with ESTF funds.

Kind regards,

Bethna Lozada

To whom it may concern,

Hello good morning, my name is Griselda Colorado, mother of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] students at Divine Redeemer Catholic School. I was able to bring my kids to this school thanks to the ESTF program. I always had this as my preference, especially since my children have had problems with bullying in public schools in the past. I trust they are safe at Divine Redeemer, and I have also seen how the individualized academic approach has helped them so much to grow and get closer to their potential. Our family hopes to continue getting the support of the ESTF program, as this would give us the chance to keep our kids in the school of our choice.

I also appreciate all your efforts to advocate for the rights of our kids. Thank you so much for that!

Sincerely,

Griselda Colorado

To Whom it May Concern,

Our children are [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is currently in 4th grade and [REDACTED] is in kindergarten. This is their third school year at Divine Redeemer. [REDACTED] is mild mannered while [REDACTED] can be disobedient at times. But, since being at Divine Redeemer the boys have both improved greatly.

We are hard working parents and spend a lot of time at work. We send our children to this school so they can get guidance and a good foundation in their lives. Also, we know that at Divine Redeemer they will get a better education than at a public school. Divine Redeemer is teaching our children the difference between right and wrong, having good manners, being kind to one another, and how to be a future leader.

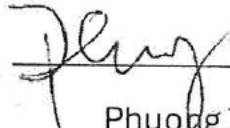
The school told us about the ESTF scholarship, and we were very excited about it because tuition can be expensive. The school helped us with the application process, and we were so happy when we found out that we were accepted to receive this scholarship. It lessened the burden of having to pay for two tuitions.

We were very disappointed to hear that the Supreme Court ended this program. We now have to think about keeping our children at this school that they love because we will have to pay for two full tuitions. But the boys already have this great foundation and if we send them to public school it will be all for nothing.

We are asking to please reconsider and bring this scholarship back to the people who want their children to get a good education.



Dahn Nguyen



Phuong Tram

Hello, my name is Margarita Lopez, I am the mother of one of the students at Divine Redeemer School. In which my daughter was fortunate to be able to attend thanks to the ESTF program.

When we found out about this scholarship we applied with the hope that she would qualify and have the privilege of attending this school. When we found out that she had qualified we were very happy because we could have never been able to send her to a school like this otherwise. And we understand! The costs to maintain a school are huge! So we felt very fortunate to see her developing and exploiting all the potential that she has in this school.

She is a very smart child and full of questions! Her ambition to keep learning many new things is growing and I know she is very lucky to be here as other children are thanks to the ESTF program. Please, if you really advocate for children, you want them to grow, to explore the world and to open their minds and above all their hearts to learn and grow, don't take away the opportunity for them to do so in a private school. Give them and us the opportunity to move forward, help us to fulfill the dream that many parents have of being able to choose where we want our children to develop their character and discipline. Education and learning is very important, but so is guiding our children to faith. Divine Redeemer helps us in this process.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" - Proverbs 22:6.

Margarita Gutierrez

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:47 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds for Private Schools

[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to ask that the Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships does not entertain legislation that would subsidize private or religious schools. As a former educator, who worked in public schools for 27 years, I know the positive impact that public schools who are properly funded can have student development and success.

I am particularly concerned about diverting funds to private and/or religious schools who do not have the ability to meet the needs of students with special needs such physical, emotional, intellectual or language needs. In my first few years as a teacher, I welcomed a former private school student into my classroom. His parents had decided to withdraw him from the private school as they noticed significant learning issues, that were identified through private testing services because private schools often do not have the staff that is trained in special education testing. They determined their son's learning difficulties stemmed from intellectual disabilities that required additional time to complete tasks to support deficits in problem-solving and reasoning. The Catholic school that the student was enrolled in had neither the ability nor desire to support this student's specific learning needs. In addition, private schools often do not need to meet the same high standards that public schools are required to be in compliance with federal law. Well-funded public schools on the other hand have the staffing and resources to support students with special needs.

Additionally, diverting funds to private schools is a dangerous practice as that will create a system of haves and have nots as many rural areas do not have access to private schools. Students in urban and suburban settings will disproportionately have access to any funds that support private and/or religious schooling. Historically, urban/suburban school districts receive more funding and are better resourced than rural school districts. Funding private schools with public money will pull even more monies from rural school districts who desperately need assistance. Having recently moved to South Carolina, I see this in my own county, Jasper, that is a rural district versus Beaufort County that is a suburban district. Students in Jasper County schools consistently perform lower than those students in neighboring Beaufort County. I am aware that Jasper County School District is currently under state supervision due to audit deficiencies and suspected mishandling of funds. However, that speaks even more for the need for funds to be allocated AND subsequently monitored to ensure students have the services they need for success in life. In Jasper County, there are five private schools and four of them are religiously based, which brings another whole issue of providing funds to private schools. These five schools would not be able to accept all the students in Jasper County. And the resulting growth of private schools who do not have staff adequately trained to instruct students in the basic curriculum would be devastating to the future success of these students. Understanding educational practices that support student learning is a craft that requires a degree in education and continued training to support innovation in teaching and learning styles.

I sincerely hope that this committee does not support the use of my public tax dollars for private schools that will just give financial breaks to those who already are attending private schools funded by parents who can afford it. Please consider the learning of all students in all school districts – properly support public schools so that they can hire the best staff and secure resources that support student learning.

Thank you,

Patti Winch
Hardeeville, SC



The Honorable Greg Hembree, Chairman
Education Committee of the Senate of South Carolina



December 10, 2024

Re: Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships on December 10, 2024

Dear Chairman Hembree and Subcommittee Members:

On behalf of The South Carolina Education Association ("The SCEA") I wish to convey our concern whether the scholarships to be discussed December 10th will divert public education dollars towards the funding of private school vouchers.

Our state's Supreme Court has repeatedly made it clear that voucher programs violate our state's constitution. Public funds should be dedicated to our public schools which educate over 95% of South Carolina's children.

It is my hope that this distinguished body upholds what is clearly outlined within our state's constitution.

As we move forward, The SCEA encourages a collaborative partnership with our state's policymakers that will focus on investing in public education fully rather than potential attempts to yet again divert resources away from public schools. Our students, teachers, families, and communities deserve nothing less.

Please contact my office should questions or the need for additional clarification exist.

With kind regards,

Sherry East

Sherry East, President



[REDACTED]

Sent:

Friday, December 6, 2024 11:48 AM

To:

Senate Education Committee

[REDACTED]

I oppose vouchers for private education because it takes funds for public education which is the backbone of our free and fair society.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:50 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Comments for the Senate Education Subcommittee Meeting on 12/10 - Kelley Kennedy

[REDACTED]

Hello,

My name is Kelley Kennedy, and I am a Richland County resident. I am writing to submit comments for the Senate Education Subcommittee Meeting on K-12 Education Scholarships for December 10, 2024.

I would like to express deep concern regarding the proposed voucher and scholarship program. Public money should be allocated to public schools in a manner that is fair for all SC children and families, regardless of their address or disability or minority status. Vouchers undermine the fairness of the public education system by diverting tax dollars to private schools, which are allowed to restrict admission to students with disabilities and other minority groups. This effectively diverts public funding and resources away from children with disabilities and from the public schools that are charged with serving and accommodating them. Furthermore, educational scholarship programs and vouchers are not accessible to most families in rural South Carolina communities because few private schools serve these areas, and the scholarships are not sufficient to cover both tuition and transportation.

Investing in the education of all SC children must be a priority to promote a bright future in our state. Please protect public education by ensuring that public funding is allocated to public schools, which guarantee transparency, accountability, and equality of access for SC children regardless of their zip code or circumstances.

Thank you,
Kelley

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:52 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: I am in opposition of diverting public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

December 6, 2024

Dear Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships,

My name is Amelia Adams and I reside at [REDACTED]

I am writing you to because **I oppose diverting public funds to private schools by any method.**

Most South Carolinians, about 90%, choose to send their children to our public schools and using public funds for private and religious schools will impact those families. I believe it a threat to our state's public education system for several reasons.

Not only will it undermine our state public schools, it will also have budgetary consequences resulting in fewer resources for our public schools.

Private schools are not accessible to many of our students in rural and low income areas. There are also few guardrails to prevent private schools from discriminating against students with disabilities, minorities and LGBTQ+ students during their admission process. That is why I do not support using public funds and the taxes that I pay to support these private institutions.

Sincerely,

Amelia Adams

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 11:56 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Do NOT divert public funds to private or religious schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to inform you that I strongly oppose any diversion of public funds to private or religious schools. My children were all educated through the Greenville County public schools and they are succeeding magnificently now that they are all adults. There are numerous issues with any diversion of public funds to private or religious schools:

1. Most parents prefer to send their children to public schools - about 90%!! Voters typically vote against the option of subsidizing private schools when they have been given the option on a ballot!
2. Few private schools serve rural and poor communities, so educational scholarship programs and vouchers are not accessible to most families in these areas. Furthermore, the funds offered would not be sufficient to cover all expenses. Thus, we create a "haves" and "have not" system of education, funded by public dollars.
3. Private and religious schools are not held to the same standards as public schools. Therefore, there is inadequate accountability for any public funds that might be distributed to them. This is unacceptable.
4. Private and religious schools are allowed to discriminate against minorities. This is against our constitution and therefore should not be funded with public dollars.
5. The diversion of public funds to private schools amounts to a de-funding of our public education system, setting in motion a downward spiral of quality and funding. It is a recipe to make public education weaker and less effective when we desperately need it to be strengthened.

Please do not adopt or introduce any bills that would undermine our public schools.

Best regards,
Michelle Simpson
Greenville, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 12:00 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School vouchers

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,
School vouchers are basically taxation without representation since local communities are deprived of holding voucher-funded schools accountable through voting. When states choose to fund these vouchers, the result is withholding resources from the most vulnerable children in our communities.

In other states where voucher programs have been implemented, most families utilizing the program never had a child in public school to begin with and most of the recipients were in a higher income bracket exceeding \$100K. In addition, voucher-funded schools don't typically reflect their communities. For example, in NC, it is common for minority students to make up less than 10% of voucher schools in districts comprised of 60% or more minorities.

In summary- vouchers do not mitigate education costs because they are primarily accessed by families who never would choose public education anyway, so it only adds to the cost and ultimately will not represent a fair pool of demographics including low income, minority and special needs children.

With South Carolina ranking in the bottom 20% in United States in Education, a bill investing hundreds of millions of tax payers funds into a program that will mostly go to a select few children who are not in need, will be a gross misuse of funds and ultimately will not improve education in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of all children in our state.

Karen Henderson
Charleston county



Our Lady of Peace School

137 Way of Peace · North Augusta, SC 29841
803-279-8396 Ext. 100 · Fax 815-301-6770
www.olpschool.us



December 2, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter in support of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund program as a parent of children who initially attended public schools upon our return to the North Augusta, SC/Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) and eventual parochial school alumni along with being a principal of Our Lady of Peace Catholic School.

Upon returning home to the CSRA following my enlistment in the United States military, my wife and I had to make a difficult decision; where will our three daughters attend school? At the time they were rather young, 6, 4, and 2 years old. My wife and I sent our oldest daughter to the local public school we were zoned for, and within two weeks we were requesting a meeting with her teacher to discuss the classroom learning and teaching environment and the information being shared openly by her classmates. My daughter, while attending Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools for her first two years of education, had truly developed a love for learning in a school environment. After a month of attending the local public school, she was very hesitant about going to school and at times was adamant about not attending. To not say too much, the classroom environment, while looking like a classroom should, lacked the discipline, structure, and consistency to ensure any kind of learning would take place. We confirmed our suspicions through communicating with other classroom and school parents and learning of their families' experiences in this school and district. While our daughter attended this Blue Ribbon School, we discovered that the classrooms were noisy, crowded, full of constant distractions, and unresponsive to calls concerning my daughter being targeted (picked on) by some of her male classmates during the less supervised times (PE, recess, etc.). My daughter was unable to be successful in such an environment and her love for learning quickly diminished to the point of disliking school.

We realized very quickly that the public schools that we were zoned for did not fit the desired environment that my wife and I wished our daughters to experience. After separating from the military and returning home with the intention of both my wife and I continuing our education in order to provide more opportunities and open more lucrative doors for us professionally, we understood that we would have to make a tremendous amount of sacrifices to send our children to a non-public school that would identify with our ideals and wants as parents along with the needs of our daughters.

My wife went back to school full-time to become a nurse. I attended night school to obtain my Master in Teaching so I could, hopefully, offset some of our children's non-public school costs by working at the school they attend along with guiding them through their K-8 experience. Due to the generosity of our extended family, my family and I were able to live in a vacant family home and only pay a pittance a month in rent. My family and I lived off the income from my two jobs and the money from my GI Bill. We were barely able to scrape by paying non-public school



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tuition only because of the assistance that our extended family provided. My family and I are very fortunate to have such a loving and supporting extended family that were in a space to be able to provide us with assistance during our time of transition. We count our blessings daily for this gift and the opportunity that we had to send our children to a non-public, parochial school aligned to our family values and beliefs. The school which we chose also provided an atmosphere much more conducive to my three daughters' desired learning environment, a curriculum aligned to our family values, and a bit more sheltered social setting which limited their exposure to some less than wholesome topics while still in elementary school.

Without our extended family providing us with that leg up and opportunity to allocate our limited funds to something we truly desired for our children, we would never have been able to have chosen where we wanted our children to attend school and what kind of education they would have received. Not all parents are as fortunate. There are more people than not in a position wanting to send their children to a school outside of the realm of public school but simply cannot afford the costs, regardless of the sacrifices they make. However this argument is presented by those opposing this school choice endeavor, are doing so at the expense of those families who are trapped under the weight of life and the ever-increasing costs of living in this society. These parents will never be able to get out from under the burden of sending their children to schools they know are not thriving in but have no other recourse due to their limited financial situation.

The communities where housing is expensive have public schools that thrive and provide resources and settings that are conducive to learning. The communities where housing costs are lack luster have public schools that are struggling mightily and as a result are avoided by the families that have the financial resources to do so along with the highly qualified and experienced teachers within the district who have seniority. This system only perpetuates the cycle of public schools in less affluent neighborhoods struggling and those in more affluent neighborhoods thriving. Our public-school funding model is broken and as a result places those who cannot afford to live in affluent neighborhoods at an inherent disadvantage. This program provides a bridge between the "have's" and the "have nots" in an attempt to garner the opportunity of success through education. As a multitude of easily accessible academic studies have provided evidence for, those who take advantage of the opportunity of quality education traditionally are linked to higher incomes, better employment opportunities, improved health outcomes, increased social mobility, and obtain the tools and skills to navigate life challenges more effectively than those who lack the same educational opportunities.

Our Lady of Peace Catholic School is a Title I school. We cater to those who wish for a religious, specifically Catholic, curriculum, small class sizes, family-like school setting, and an infusion of faith-based approaches to all aspects of student and child development and engagement. We, as a school, do this at the expense of salaries, resources, and other amenities that are luxuries at other schools. Our tuition is extremely affordable as we prioritize our ministerial service over our financial gain. Our school community understands this and makes



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the decision to send their children here in order to have a faith-based education and infusion of Christ into their child's life outside of their time together as a family.

Upon discovering that the ESTF program was being implemented we wanted to make sure that anyone who could benefit from the program knew about it and could make the informed decision to send their children to a school of their choice (not only Our Lady of Peace) with the financial restoration of tax dollars through the scholarship program. Twenty-six applicants who qualified for the program chose to send their children to Our Lady of Peace with the assistance they received. This resulted in the inclusion of an additional \$156,000 of tuition income in the 2024 – 2025 school budget. These families would not have considered anything other than public school without this program being available. These families could not afford to send their children to a non-public school without a substantial amount of financial assistance, more than we were capable of providing prior to the cancellation of the program.

When the families and school were informed of the immediate discontinuation of the ESTF program, we assured our families that their children would not be removed from the school. Our Lady of Peace Catholic School views our mission as a ministry of Christ and will continue to honor the promises made with or without the assistance from the state. Although, without the assistance from the state as initially provided to the families in need, the school has been required to make drastic budgetary cuts to the point of cutting all additional expenses not involving already hired personnel. Two positions have remained vacant due to the cuts. All conferences normally attended by faculty and staff along with third party professional development has been cancelled this year. We have limited our digital subscriptions to textbooks, reading tools, etc. to teacher access only. We have had to delay, and possibly cancel, our textbook/program leasing schedule until we can get a true picture of the outcome of this program. The above are just a few of the adaptations we have been forced to make in order to meet our mission of providing all students with the education they have chosen to pursue.

This program is a blessing for all citizens in this great state, for “a rising tide lifts all boats.” I would hope that all South Carolinians wish the best for their state brethren and fellow Americans. I cannot see the negative aspect of this program and why a loving, compassionate, intelligent person would want to deny so many people of an opportunity of choosing their own child's academic path and possibly affecting their future, along with their families' future generations, in an overwhelmingly positive manner.

I hope that this program can be discussed openly without the stigma of being politicized, for if the legislature of this state is truly in the business of doing what is best for South Carolinians I fail to recognize how this cannot be reinstated immediately.

Respectfully,



Our Lady of Peace School

137 Way of Peace · North Augusta, SC 29841

803-279-8396 Ext. 100 · Fax 815-301-6770

www.olpschool.us



Stephen Hickey

Stephen Hickey, Ed.S.

Personal



Professional



[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 12:16 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funding for Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Attn: SC Senate Education Committee

Hello, I am writing to express my concerns about diverting taxpayer funds to private schools across our state. As a taxpaying resident of Dorchester County and parent of a child in Dorchester County District 2, I strongly **oppose the use of public funds for private education.**

Taxpayer funds should only be allocated to public schools accessible to ALL families. Diverting taxpayer dollars to private schools **robs** SC students, teachers, staff, and our local communities of the ability to receive or provide a quality education. Furthermore about 90% of parents in SC support public schools and have **opposed** the idea of using taxpayer funds for private schools. We **choose** to send our child to public school.

Private schools also do not serve low-income and rural families therefore most of these families do not have access to private schools. Primarily due to 1) the cost and expense of private education as well as 2) the proximity of private schools which are concentrated in the metropolitan pockets" across our state. In other states, when taxpayer funds were allocated to private schools for voucher/choice programs, it has been reported that many of the recipients did not need the funding/resources.

Diverting taxpayers funds to private schools and private education both **targets and robs minorities** of their right to public education resources. Private and religious schools also further run the risk of discriminatory admissions and practices.

Should taxpayer resources and funds be distributed to private or religious schools — lawmakers must hold them accountable and provide oversight. These schools must be held to the same educational standards and standardized tests required by public schools. They must be required to provide transparency into their use of taxpayer funds and make an annual accountability report available to the public that details the school's use of funds, their academic achievement, student population, and curriculum.

These are a few of my concerns as a voting taxpayer. I hope that you will take these into consideration and **vote against using public funds for private schools.**

Regards,

Shiante Teachey
Summerville, SC

Good morning, I would like to start this letter by greeting those who are reading this letter.

First of all I would like to introduce myself. I am Aracely Delgadillo, married to Elias Lomeli Sandoval. We have three children: [REDACTED] We were one of the families benefited from the ESTF program. When we heard about this scholarship we were very excited about the idea that our children would have the opportunity to study in a better school where they would have a better learning experience and what better way to do it than with our Catholic faith. It was also very important for us to find a school where they could feel safe and appreciated in our culture.

We moved to the United States a couple years ago, I am an American citizen and we lived in Mexico while my husband worked on his immigration status. My children are American citizens, and it has been very difficult to start from scratch in a new country with new people, without our family, but especially without the language. We lived in Houston, Texas, for a while. Later my husband decided to move here to South Carolina, because his sister lives here and everything would be easier with our family nearby, and so it was.

However, it has been very hard for our kids this transition. In the previous school, our daughter was crying almost every day because of the sadness that the children and the teachers did not understand her. For our son also, there wasn't a day that he didn't cry at the school, the children made fun of him because he didn't know the language and didn't want to play with him because they didn't understand him, he never wanted to go to class and the teachers were not at all affectionate with him. We were very worried, our suffering continued and we wondered if we were doing the right thing, in short they didn't want to go to school. We were very frustrated, I think as parents we would like them to be in a bubble where nothing would happen to them but we know we have to let them out into the world.

So then, when we arrived to Charleston, we found the ESTF opportunity. We enrolled our children at Divine Redeemer with the fear of being in a new school and repeat the story, but with high hopes because there was a higher cultural diversity in there. Since the first day we felt so blessed! We feel as part of a community, they gave us a great welcome, everyone was very kind, they just made us part of their family. The classes began and the teachers were very affectionate, they gave love to our children, today they feel motivated to go to their school to see their classmates and their teachers, just in one month they showed a great progress in their academics, in their communication, they are learning English, they are gaining confidence in themselves and they are close to God.

Now we are facing the news that the ESTF program cannot be used to pay the tuition, such news have caused us sadness, anger, disappointment, and anguish. We dont want to take them out of this school only for economic reasons! If I could get into the minds of these people and into their hearts I would ask them for a reason! A reason to understand why this is more important than the needs of all these affected kids. In a world where all the choices are so respected, why not respect the choices of us, parents who also want the best for their kids.

I hope God will touch and speak to your hearts and help us with this situation that has several families worried. I hope God bless you and always take care of you. Thank you for taking the time to read these words and I hope with all my heart that the best decision will be made for everyone.

SINCERELY

LOMELI DELGADILLO FAMILY

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 12:28 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: Ott, Russell Running for SC Senate
Subject: Vote No to Public Funding for Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Vote "NO" to Public Funding for Private Schools.

Public education funding should be used ONLY for public schools ... NOT for private schools!

- If parents don't want to take advantage of a quality publicly-funded education, then they should be expected to pay for a private one for their child.
- If they want to ban certain types of students through exclusions (and as accepted at public schools), they can fund a private education for their child.
- If they want religious prayer and pledge of allegiance incorporated into education, they can fund a private education for their child.
- If they want book banning and revisionist history taught, they can fund a private education for their child.

You are SC Senators and, as such, you are "public" servants. Therefore, you should ensure "public" dollars go toward "public" institutions.

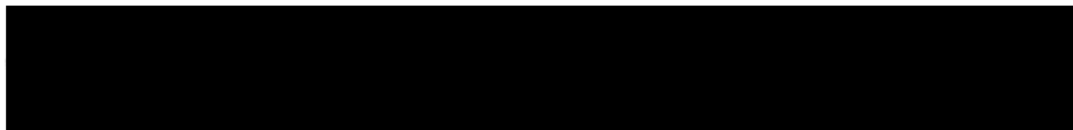
Do the right thing. Vote "NO" to a voucher system to fund private education. Otherwise, you may set in motion the ultimate demise of public education in South Carolina.

I would like to receive a personalized response from each member of the SC Senate Education Committee.


Thank you!

Sent from my iPhone:

Mary Safko



Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 12:50 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: Ed Sutton
Subject: No taxpayer funds for private and religious schools, please



Dear Senators and Members of the Education Committee. Along with AAUW and League of Women Voters, I implore you to oppose the use of public tax revenues to fund even a portion of private and religious education in our state. Public Schools have long been underfunded. We try hard to not believe these disparities are intentional. It's been common knowledge that Act 388 crippled the local public schools property tax resources and everyone suffered equally for a generation.

Now that our state has and is blessed by an envied economy, public Ed must benefit first and foremost. To decide otherwise is cruel and unworthy of our honesty and integrity. Please do not defame our honor as South Carolinians. May your Christmas be merry and bright. Best regards, Carol Jackson

Carol Jackson



"No persistence; no goodliness"
—sign seen in Hong Kong—

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 1:20 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public funds to private schools

[REDACTED]

Please vote against diverting public funding to private schools. This will only dilute support for quality education and further erode the ability of our public school to serve all of our children. Private schools that are not resultant of subject to state oversight should not be getting public funds. Instead the state should finnell more money into out public schools, raising teacher salaries and funding additional programs that will benefit all students.

Please vote against this.

Pamela Madaio

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 1:23 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School vouchers

[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

As a parent who has had my child in both public and private schools and as a citizen who is helping to increase the number of charter schools in SC, I do NOT support school vouchers.

Charter schools allow for creative funding/academic achievement/less red tape, while still being held accountable by the public.

Private school vouchers amount to taxation without representation since local.com. These schools are accountable through voting.

In addition, it will impact our most vulnerable communities unfairly. It will allow those who are unscrupulous to open private schools with this funding and not be held accountable.

In other states where voucher programs have been implemented, most families utilizing the program never had a child in public school to begin with and most of the recipients were in a higher income bracket exceeding \$100K.

In addition, voucher-funded schools don't typically reflect their communities. For example, in NC, it is common for minority students to make up less than 10% of voucher schools in districts comprised of 60% or more minorities.

In summary- vouchers do not mitigate education costs because they are primarily accessed by families who never would choose public education anyway, so it only adds to the cost and ultimately will not represent a fair pool of demographics including low income, minority and special needs children.

With South Carolina ranking in the bottom 20% in United States in Education, a bill investing hundreds of millions of tax payer's funds into a program that will mostly go to a select few children who are not in need, will be a gross misuse of funds and ultimately will not improve education in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of all children in our state.

Stephanie O'Cain

[REDACTED]

Sent from my mobile device.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 1:34 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diversion of public funds to relive school

[REDACTED]

As a tax payer I urge you to reject the proposal to divert money from public schools to private and religious schools. This unjust proposal will completely undermine the public schools which have no other funding than tax Dollars.

Sincerely

Derek and Inger Fyfe

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 1:42 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting public money for private use

[REDACTED]

Members of **The Senate Education Subcommittee on K-12 Education Scholarships**

I will follow closely the outcome of your December 10 meeting.

The following points are most important to me regarding public education funding:

- Disbursing public funds requires public accountability. As a lawmaker you are accountable for the responsible use of public money, any **private or religious schools that accept such funds should be held to the same educational standards that are required of public schools.** These educational standards include financial transparency, and public reporting of academic achievement using the same standardized tests that are required of public school students.
- Private schools can discriminate against minorities. Private schools can set their own admissions policies and standards, which could be discriminatory. **Public funds should not be available to pay for schools that discriminate against students with disabilities or other minority groups, including racial or ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students.**

Thank you for your service and your time.

Carolyn Bishop-McLeod

"Let all the world be blessed with peace through us."

~A Course in Miracles

Namaste 🙏🙏🙏🙏

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 2:13 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Cc: JudithKramer
Subject: Diversion of Public Funds to Private/religious Schools

[REDACTED]

To Whom it May Concern:

I oppose diverting public funds (our hard earned money) to private or religious schools by any method.

My understanding of our Constitution is there **must** be a separation between Church and State. Having experienced religious schools during my growing up I know they are not neutral in any way and usually represent only one perspective in a country of thousands of perspectives and religions.

Please Do not vote to provide my money to any school not in the SC Public School System.

Thank you.

Judith Kramer
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 2:16 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School Vouchers

[REDACTED]

SC Senate,

My name is Paige Stovall and I live in Rock Hill, SC. I am parent and teacher, and I have concerns about the possible voucher legislation. I think it is vital that we protect our local schools that serve every student in the community. I am most concerned about the access for students from disadvantaged homes, as well as students with disabilities. Private schools can choose who they educate, this means many students will not have the opportunity to attend private schools. Only 1.5% to 3% of kids receiving vouchers in other states are students with disabilities. We have also seen a divide between races and socio-economic status, abled and disabled.

If vouchers are to be proposed, please consider income caps to ensure that all families and students have access to them. Please also include provisions for special needs, students with IEPs and Behavior plans. If these are not provided not only will the makeup of these private schools be disproportionate with the community but also the need for more educators in private schools will increase causing teachers to leave public schools where they may be vitally important to choose to teach in private schools with what some may consider a better population of students.

Thank you for all your work in our state.

Sincerely,
Paige Stovall

Sent from Outlook

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 2:18 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diversion Of Tax Dollars to Private/Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

I am strongly against the diversion of public school tax dollars to private and or religious schools. Public funds belong in public schools. Our SC public schools are in bad shape and require all the funding possible. Please don't make the mistake of harming the public school system any further.

Terri Graham

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent:

To:

Subject:

Friday, December 6, 2024 2:26 PM
Senate Education Committee
Tuition Funding

[REDACTED]

Please do not allow public funds to be used for private and parochial schools. While this may help higher income parents, it will definitely harm lower income families. Taking public resources from public schools will harm those schools and in turn harm the students that attend them. The erosion of public schools needs to stop. Our schools would drastically improve if students all attended their neighborhood schools.

--
Deborah Bobo

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."
— Anne Lamott

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 2:29 PM
To: Senate Education Committee

[REDACTED]

I disagree that taxpayers money should be used to send "some" children to private schools. If a parent wants their child to be educated in a private school it is their responsibility to pay for that privilege. I especially disagree with this because not all children from moderate to low income families can get into some private schools due to the practice of the lottery system to select students. I myself went to private catholic schools, but my parents paid out of pocket for me to attend those schools.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 3:03 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Diverting Public Funds to Support Private/Religious Schools

[REDACTED]

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to express my concerns with and disdain for school vouchers. While they may prove beneficial to some students in certain circumstances, it is clear from these programs being enacted in other states that they have benefited those families whose children already attend private schools significantly more than families living in poverty. Public funds should be used to benefit public schools, not weaken them in favor of private and religious schools.

Further, public funds should be used only for secular, public schools. No religion should be favored over any other religion on the public's dime. No religion should be furthered in public schools at all.

Sincerely,
Amber Gilliam
Hanahan, SC

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 3:15 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Oppose school voucher

[REDACTED]

To the members of our SC Senate:

I implore you to please vote against school vouchers and the private governance of public schools. You are convening on December 10 to discuss the K-12 Education Scholarships. Schools should not be privatized nor should vouchers be issued to families who are already taking up 95% of the seats in private schools and affording the tuition on their own. They would drain the state's and our public school funding, allowing room for very few new students to enroll. School vouchers benefit primarily the middle-upper class and those affording the private school tuition on their own. It is a path to make the wealthy wealthier and the poor poorer in a less funded school.

As demonstrated in the Charleston County School District (CCSD), public-private partnership schools have little to no transparency and accountability, raising serious concerns about the schools' governance, policymaking, budget decisions, and student acceptance and retention practices. Public-private partnership school takeovers displace school staff, and, if hired by the private company, educators lose state benefits and rights. I adamantly oppose school vouchers.

Mary Stepling
Richland County

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 3:19 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Sending public money to private schools

[REDACTED]

Our public schools are already underfunded and to divert money to private schools would be disastrous. Please do not vote yes to this proposal.

Pat Polychron

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 3:22 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Say NO to taxpayer money for private and religious schools!

[REDACTED]

As a taxpayer with multiple children in public school, I DO NOT want taxes to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools. South Carolina uses more federal money than other states to fund K-12 public education, as such our public schools have no money to spare.

The American Association of University Women, League of Women Voters SC, AAUW and LWV Charleston Area all oppose diverting taxpayer funds to private schools.

Diverting money to private and religious schools is a threat to our state's public education system. Transfer payments from schools with low income students in need to wealthy students that can afford their pick of private and religious schools is unacceptable.

Please say no to taxpayer money for private and religious schools.

Sincerely,

Kristen Worst

Written Remarks for the SC Senate Education Subcommittee Meeting (12/10/2024)

Submitted by: Candace Carroll

Director of Public Affairs with Americans for Prosperity South Carolina

Honorable Chairman Hembree and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

My name is Candace Carroll, and I am the Director of Public Affairs with *Americans for Prosperity South Carolina* (AFP-SC). Our organization is dedicated to advancing policies that promote freedom, opportunity, and prosperity for all South Carolinians. Central to our vision is making South Carolina the freest state in the South, and we firmly believe that expanding educational freedom is one of the most powerful ways to achieve this.

As a mother of a child with autism, I have personally navigated the public school system and experienced the limitations it places on children with special needs. While there have been positive moments, too often I have found that my child's needs aren't being met due to a lack of resources, flexibility, or specialized support. It is this personal experience that fuels my advocacy for universal school choice. No family should be confined to a system that doesn't meet their child's unique needs, and no child should be left behind because of their background, location, or learning differences.

The School Choice Movement: A National Imperative

Across the country, the school choice movement is gaining momentum. More than 30 states have already passed some form of school choice programs, allowing parents the freedom to select the best educational options for their children—whether through private, charter, or homeschool options. However, South Carolina is falling behind, offering fewer opportunities for families to select the right fit for their child's education.

We cannot afford to remain passive while other states lead the way. As more states create pathways for parents to choose the best educational opportunity for their children, South Carolina must act to ensure that every student has access to the education they deserve.

Why South Carolina Needs Universal School Choice

1. **Fostering Freedom for Families:** As a mother, I want the freedom to choose the best educational path for my child. Parents know their children best and should have the power to select the school that understands and addresses their specific needs. Universal school choice provides that power, allowing every parent to choose the best educational environment for their child—whether it's a private school with specialized programs, a charter school, or homeschooling.

2. **Equity for All Students:** School choice is not just about convenience or access for affluent families—it is a matter of equity. Families in underserved areas or rural communities often find themselves trapped in underperforming public schools that lack the resources to meet the needs of their children. By giving families access to K-12 Education Scholarships, we can ensure that every child—regardless of their zip code, income, or learning ability—has access to a quality education that best serves their needs.
3. **Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities:** For children with special needs, such as autism, the public school system often fails to provide the individualized support necessary for success. Schools are stretched thin, and many lack the specialized programs or staff to support students with learning differences. Universal school choice offers parents the ability to direct their child's education dollars toward schools or services that can better support their child's needs, whether through private schools with autism-focused curricula, specialized charter schools, or therapy programs.
4. **Innovation and Competition:** School choice fosters competition, which leads to innovation and improvements in the education system. By allowing families the freedom to choose, schools are incentivized to improve their offerings to meet the needs of students. This results in better outcomes for all students—whether in public, private, or charter schools.

A Call to Action: Universal School Choice Now

As other states move forward with expanding school choice, South Carolina must act quickly or risk falling further behind. Our students deserve the same opportunities as children in other states, and we must act quickly to ensure that no child is left behind while other states innovate and improve their educational systems.

To make South Carolina the freest state in the South, we must ensure that every family has the ability to choose the best educational path for their children. Universal school choice, including expanding K-12 Education Scholarships, is an essential step toward making that vision a reality. It will give families more options, improve the quality of education across the state, and create a system where every child—regardless of ability or background—can thrive.

We look forward to working with this Subcommittee and the entire General Assembly to expand school choice and provide all South Carolina families with the freedom to choose the best education for their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 3:34 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds for public schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Honorable Senators,

Please uphold the use of public funds only for public schools. It's just that simple.

Thank you for your service,

Patricia Leigh Trivette
[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

December 6, 2024

Dear Senators,

I'm a homeschool association director under Option 3 (SC 59-65-47). I understand that current homeschoolers were not allowed to apply for access to the ESTF program. It isn't for homeschoolers, but it does affect us.

I support the effort to provide certain funding for facilitating a child's education. However, I do not see a clear path for the ESTF participants to be successful. I am concerned about their academic requirements and the restrictions that prohibit them from enrolling in an existing accountability option.

Compulsory Attendance: In order to leave the public school system, the student is supposed to show where they've transferred/enrolled. It's not clear how the ESTF participants are able to demonstrate this. If they are transferring to a private school program, do they have to be enrolled full time? Homeschooling in SC is a clear exception to compulsory attendance—but, ESTF participants are prohibited from those programs.

Class Wallet only manages the funding disbursements. Participants do not have a "home-base, home-office", not even a basic membership certificate.

Academic Record-Keeping Requirements: The academic oversight is also not equitable to current home education laws. It doesn't make sense to offer the ESA participants funding to DIY their child's education and not require the same academic record-keeping requirements as other DIY educational participants who aren't getting any funding.

I understand there is supposed to be annual standardized testing that is required for the ESA participants. And that makes sense to have that requirement as part of the funding provision. But it should not replace the other academic measures that exist for others who are conducting education at home.

- Home Education includes the basic subjects: Reading/Writing, Math, Science and Social Studies (in 7th grade Reading/Writing is Literature/Composition). The subjects outlined in S556 do not include writing or composition--only grammar. This is not an equitable subject requirement.
- Home Education includes Record-Keeping: Lesson Plans or Journal of daily learning activities, Portfolio of samples from student work, and a semi-annual progress report.

By outlining this layer of academic record-keeping, it provides an equitable requirement for all parent directed home education plans.

Academic Accountability/Oversight: Class Wallet oversees the financial disbursements. But, who is the academic oversight for the DIY participants? Independent educational consultants are not allowed to register as vendors with Class Wallet. Only tutors who work directly with students and curriculum providers.

Imagine you had never cooked before and ran into the grocery store wanting to know what to cook for dinner? It would be very difficult to figure it out on your own. Now also imagine you have a wallet of coupons for certain products that you want to spend first. Would you be able to come up with a complete, balanced menu?

This is how many ESTF parents are trying to figure out how to DIY their child's educational plan. Without any idea how to plan their course of study and also having to stick to the providers in the program.

It is a mistake to prohibit accountability associations from registering as vendors, the same way that private schools are allowed to decide whether or not to take ESTF participants. If you will not allow the association to decide, then there has to be a way for independent educational consultants to register as vendors. This vital service is needed for DIY participants to be successful.

This ESTF program is taking the most vulnerable citizens, and prohibiting them from accessing the resources and programs that are already available to assist them with academic verifications. They are in a limbo-land outside the school system.

- Parent made transcripts are subject to additional scrutiny and verification processes.
- Low income and special needs families are often eligible for programs and services that require a school official to verify. Government agencies will need to be able to verify their ongoing compliance.

Some outspoken homeschoolers and associations who do not want this program. We are generally reluctant and resistant to change. But, if the program continues forth, there should be equitable options for the participants. It is a much bigger problem if there are nomads wandering outside of the school system—without the similar oversight and accountability as current homeschoolers.

I suggest that the associations be allowed to apply as providers so that the ESTF expenses can be used for these necessary services. And also allow for ESTF participants to pay out of pocket to register with an association. That way, associations who resist the option of accepting government funds do not have to do so.

Our groups will have to figure out how to cooperate with the ESTF participants who are going to DIY their child's education.

Respectfully,

Kim Andrysczyk

SC TOP Homeschool Association, director

The SC Homeschooling Connection, owner

PS. Please also consider the Equal Access law that states a "one year prior" clause for homeschool participants. What happens with ESTF students who don't have anyone to verify enrollment. Will they be allowed to play sports at all? Why should anyone who is academically eligible to play—but happens to transfer to a home-education model—then be required to sit out for a year? This is unnecessarily punitive. This clause was temporarily waived during covid, but it should be permanently changed.

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 4:20 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School funding

[REDACTED]

I am against funding private and religious schools with public funds.
Pat Malone

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 5:32 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: NO to public school funds diversion


[REDACTED]

I strongly urge you not to take much-needed funds from public schools to fund "school choice vouchers" for private schools. Public Schools in SC need these funds to upgrade and improve their educational offerings.


If people want to go to private schools, that is their privilege, but they should not receive public funds to do so.

Barbara Sloan

[REDACTED]



Sent: Friday, December 6, 2024 6:34 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds for private schools.



To privatize education means less money spent on education because the private business must make a profit. Do not subsidized private schools with public funds. I speak with authority and experience after 32 years in public education. I strongly oppose weakening our public schools, already among the worst in the nation because education has never been a high priority. Do not defund public education by spending public funds for private schools.
Sent from my iPad

[REDACTED]

Sent:

Friday, December 6, 2024 9:25 PM

To:

Senate Education Committee

Subject:

Opposition to diverting public funds to private schools.

[REDACTED]

I am writing to strongly voice my **OPPOSITION TO DIVERTING PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS**. Our state needs to protect the public funds we have for all children.
Linda Michalak

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, December 7, 2024 12:42 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Please Help

[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern,

I strongly oppose any diversion of taxpayer funds to private schools. Allowing taxpayer money to be used to fund tuition at private or religious schools is a threat to our state's public education system. Public school programs are grossly underfunded, and it isn't fair to channel money into private institutions.

Respectfully,
Lori D. Hudak

Sent from my iPhone

[REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, December 7, 2024 10:54 AM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: DO NOT DIVERT TAXPAYER FUNDS TO PRIVATE OR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS!
Importance: High

[REDACTED]

A product of the public education system, I am a successful, influential business executive and mentor to young individuals entering the workforce. I am proud of the education public schools provided me, and would NEVER swap it for one from a private or religious school.

A good education is not a privilege, it is a right. Everyone -- poor or wealthy -- must be assured of improving their life via education. **DO NOT DEPRIVE THOSE LESS FORTUNATE OF AN EDUCATION BY DIVERTING TAXPAYER FUNDS TO WELL-ENDOWED PRIVATE SCHOOLS.**

Dulce A. Chicón

[REDACTED]
Seabrook Island Resident

[REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, December 7, 2024 12:49 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public Funds Should not Go to Private Schools

[REDACTED]

Not only has our state supreme court ruled that sending public school funds to private schools is unconstitutional, voters across the country (even in states where the state voted for the top of the republican ticket) rejected it. The funding of our public schools is already limited by the structuring of our homeowner property taxes. Do not add insult to injury. Please spend your time making certain our public schools are fully funded rather than wasting time on creating even more public school funding problems.

Julie

Julie Hussey
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, December 7, 2024 6:31 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: Public funds for private schools

[REDACTED]

Hello,

I am writing in regards to the taxpayer funding of private schools. I am actually a former teacher turned homeschool mom. HSLDA does NOT represent SC homeschoolers which is what at least one legislator told me in the past.

My children cannot attend private school due to my middle son's need for medical care at school. We have also not been served by public schools so we homeschool. Why should a private school that is owned by a church or some other corporation be allowed to access taxpayer funds but not homeschool parents WHO ELECT to meet the requirements as set forth by the legislation? Why do the anti-choice homeschoolers talk so much about choice while infringing on mine?

I would appreciate a response.

Amanda McTeer
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: Sunday, December 8, 2024 5:12 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: oppose public tax funds for private schools

[REDACTED]

Dear Education Committee,
I am a South Carolinian living in West Columbia. I strongly oppose using tax funds for private schools.
Melanie McGehee

[REDACTED]

Sent: Sunday, December 8, 2024 9:57 PM
To: Senate Education Committee
Subject: School vouchers

[REDACTED]

Note that I am opposed to diverting tax dollars to private and religious schools. It is the responsibility of the State of South Carolina to offer public school education to all who need it.

There is no oversight of private school education and anyone who opts to send their child to private school needs to pay for it out of their own pocket. Sending my child to private school through the eighth grade was my choice and my money. Public school education has improved in recent years and my son finished his education at a public school.

Thank you,
Nanci Kestenbaum

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone



December 17, 2024

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on S. 62, scheduled for your review on January 8, 2025.

As the largest organization for professional educators in South Carolina, the Palmetto State Teachers Association is committed to the advancement of equal and excellent educational opportunities for all South Carolina students. To achieve this goal, PSTA supports the right of families to select the best educational setting for their child, and under the state constitution, PSTA believes any educational setting receiving state funds must be affordable and accessible to all students as well as accountable to the taxpayers of the state.

Given the findings of the state Supreme Court in the *Adams* and *Eidson* cases, PSTA has significant doubts about the constitutionality of some elements of the program outlined in S. 62. However, since determinations of constitutionality are made by the judicial branch of government, PSTA recognizes the important work of the legislative branch in constructing the best possible policies, regardless of potential judicial review of final legislation. In this light, PSTA offers the following feedback in order to enhance affordability, accessibility, and accountability within the proposed K-12 education lottery scholarship program:

AFFORDABILITY: As evidenced by the income eligibility criteria in §59-8-110 (2)(b)(iiii), the K-12 education lottery scholarship is grounded in a desire to extend additional educational opportunities to families that currently lack the necessary financial means. S. 62 could more fully deliver on that goal through the following revisions:

- **Amend §59-8-140(3) to read-** "An education service provider must certify annually to the department that it meets all program requirements. The education service provider reapplying shall certify to the department that it continues to meet all program requirements and that it has not raised the cost of attendance for a K-12 scholarship student enrolled during the previous school year by an amount greater than any increase in the ratio of the Consumer Price Index as calculated annually by the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office under §15-32-220(F) and §15-32-530(D).
 - Rationale- The implementation of ESA programs in other states has been associated with an increase of the average cost of private school tuition. For example, a study of ESA programs in Iowa and Nebraska found that "partial eligibility" programs (such as what is proposed in S. 62) resulted in a 10-16% increase in private school tuition rates. Such tuition increases can result in a lower income family being "priced out" from one year to the next of the very educational setting that the ESA was designed to make affordable. Inclusion of an index-based limit on ESA student tuition increases can ensure these students are able to remain in their educational setting of choice across school years.
- **Reinstate existing §59-8-110 (4)(b)**
 - Rationale- The removal of this section from the existing statute, coupled with the rolling admission program proposed in S. 62, makes the K-12 education lottery scholarship less accessible than the existing Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) program for low income families that currently lack the means to afford the cost of alternative educational settings. The experience of ESA programs in other states demonstrates that the removal of a prior public



ACCESSIBILITY: In some areas, S. 62 takes important steps to make South Carolina's ESA program *more* accessible to students than the existing ESTF program. Most notably, the bill adds "fees for interdistrict public school transfers" and "contracted services from....a public charter school" to the list of "qualifying expenses" in §59-8-110 (12). **PSTA strongly supports these additions as these options are accessible to every South Carolina student given the requirement for traditional and charter public schools to admit any student, regardless of their background or personal characteristics.** However, PSTA believes the following actions would also enhance accessibility in S. 62:

- **Reverse the order of §59-8-115 (D)(4)(f) and (g), and amend the start of the renumbered (D)(4)(g) to read-** "~~that includes documentation of they have completed and documented~~ the consultation process between the parent, the resident school district,...."
 - Rationale- These subsections of the bill are critically important to maintain accessible educational options for students qualifying for services under IDEA. The recommended edits to these subsections are simply intended to enhance clarity in informing families of their rights and informing education service providers of their obligations.
- **Reinstate §59-8-150(A)(3) to read-** "~~not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin~~ admit students on the same basis as charter schools under §59-40-40(2)(b). This item shall not be interpreted to preclude any independent or religious educational provider from exercising an exemption allowed under federal law; and"
 - Rationale- PSTA strenuously objects to the proposed removal of the language in the existing ESTF statute that prohibits an education service provider from "unlawfully discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin," as such an action inherently diminishes the accessibility of educational choice for students and families. PSTA proposes that instead of striking this language completely, the Senate should replace the existing language with a requirement for participating ESPs to admit students on the same basis as what is required of charter schools under state law. Since S. 62 envisions a system of choice that encompasses private *and* public options, students and families would benefit from having the same accessibility criteria for all educational settings participating in the K-12 lottery scholarship program.
- **Strike proposed alterations to §59-8-165**
 - Rationale- PSTA **strongly** supports the expansion of interdistrict choice envisioned in the proposed changes to §59-8-165. However, PSTA believes such an expansion is better achieved through statute than through the adoption of a "model policy" by the department. Recent experience with State Board "model policies" for unencumbered time for teachers and student cell phone access have resulted in inconsistent implementation of statewide policy across districts. Instead of amending §59-8-165, PSTA believes the Senate should revisit the work done by the Senate Education Committee on interdistrict *and* intradistrict choice policies during the 2022 session as the best pathway toward expanding open enrollment opportunities.

ACCOUNTABILITY: S. 62 makes some significant improvements over the existing ESTF program in the area of accountability. The addition of "non-profit" in §59-8-110(12)(a) as well as the removal of §59-8-110(12)(l) increases the accountability of the K-12 lottery scholarship program to the people's elected representatives in the legislature. PSTA offers the following recommendations to further enhance accountability in S. 62:

- **Amend §59-8-150(C)(1)(b) to read-** "in lieu of the assessments required by subitem (a), ensure that each scholarship recipient in grades three through eight takes a nationally norm-referenced summative



- Rationale- §59-8-140(A)(5) currently requires the department to include a “website address for each education service provider” found on the department’s “list of approved education service providers.” However, as of December 2024, 25 different ESPs have “do not have a website” listed in the “website” column of the department’s list. The lack of a website both inhibits the ability of a family to learn about available educational services and limits program transparency to the general public.

PSTA is happy to answer any questions a member of the Education Committee may have regarding this feedback.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback and for your service to South Carolina.

Sincerely,

Kathy Maness
Executive Director

Patrick Kelly
Director of Governmental Affairs



Legislature Proposes Solution to ESTF Issue

Last month, a state Senate education subcommittee held a hearing on school choice. This was due in large part to the South Carolina Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of the Education Scholarship Trust Fund program. Just a few weeks into the school year, the court ruled that ESTF funds could no longer be used to pay for tuition in nonpublic schools.

The South Carolina Legislature immediately began to work to restore school choice and to extend it to more students and families. At the Dec. 10 hearing, many scholarship recipients, their parents and affected school principals were present to show support and demand solutions. Holding a hearing before the start of a new legislative session is a rarity and indicates that members of the House and Senate intend to honor their promise to reinstate school choice.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Sen. Greg Hembree, chair of the Senate Education Committee, was joined by Sens. Rex Rice and Larry Grooms in pre-filing [Senate Bill 62](#) this month, which would change the name of the ESTF program to the **K-12 Education Lottery Scholarship** program.

PLEASE NOTE: This bill has not been passed into law. The current ESTF program still remains. The Legislature must pass, and the governor must sign, this bill to replace the current program.

If passed into law, the education lottery scholarship would:

Address the constitutionality concerns of the S.C. Supreme Court by changing the method of funding the program. The funding would come from the South Carolina Education Lottery Account. Therefore, no public funds could be considered to violate Art. XI, Section 4 of the S.C. Constitution, which states: "No money shall be paid from public funds nor shall the credit of the State or any of its political subdivisions be used for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution."

Allow for the funds to cover nonpublic school tuition (see above).

Make almost all South Carolina families eligible. In the current program, eligible applicants must come from families with a household income below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In the new program, the requirement would rise to 600% of the FPL. Most families in our state fall within this FPL, meaning almost all K-12 students would be eligible.

Have a rolling application window. Rather than having just two months each year to apply, students could submit applications on a rolling basis and would be notified within 30 days.

Remove all other eligibility requirements. A student would no longer be required to have attended a public school the previous year. Students would need to reside in the state and have a household income below the FPL for that academic year.

NEXT STEPS

A Senate education subcommittee is slated to discuss the new bill on Jan. 8 at 10:00 a.m. at the State House in Gressette Room 105.

The subcommittee will not hear testimony, but advocates are invited to join the Catholic Conference at the hearing to show support for the bill.

As Catholics, we have long celebrated the importance of education in shaping the minds of the young. God gave us the gift of reason, and he desires us to form our minds to know, love and serve him. Children who receive a well-rounded education that forms body and soul can go into the world as good citizens, and they are set on the path to being citizens of heaven. Pope Benedict XVI said that a good school “provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints.”

Everyone deserves a quality education, no matter their socioeconomic level, location, race or any other factor. The Catholic Conference is committed to ensuring that current ESTF students stay in their schools of choice, and that all students in South Carolina will one day have academic freedom.

[SEND A MESSAGE OF SUPPORT TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE HERE](#)

REPLY TO: advocacy@charlestandiocese.org



Sent by St. Joseph Catholic Church

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