

The National Coalition

for

Public Education

March 26, 2015

Re: Oppose Any Amendment to S. Con. Res. 11 that Would Create a Private School Voucher Program

Dear Senator:

The 53 undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) write to express our strong opposition to any amendments to the Fiscal 2016 Senate Budget Resolution (S. Con Res. 11) that would support the creation of a private school voucher or tuition tax credit program. Rather than providing equal access to high quality education, setting high standards and ensuring accountability for all students, these programs have proven ineffective, lack accountability to taxpayers, deprive students of rights provided to public school students, and threaten religious liberty.

Voucher and tuition tax credit programs would divert desperately-needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of a few, select voucher students while ignoring overall student academic achievement. Indeed, according to multiple studies of the District of Columbia, Milwaukee, and Cleveland school voucher programs, students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math compared to students in public schools.¹ Voucher programs targeted to students with disabilities are especially troubling, as they impose obstacles that prevent these students from receiving the special services that they need, while simultaneously removing essential public funds that would address the needs of all students with disabilities. Congress would better serve ALL children by directing funds to make public schools stronger and safer instead of creating a new voucher or tuition tax credit program.

Voucher and tuition tax credits support schools that are not bound by the open and nondiscriminatory acceptance policies that are a unifying factor among the diverse range of ethnic and religious communities of our society, and the very strength of our public school system. Public schools serve any and all students that walk through the school house doors, regardless of race, religion, disability, gender, or income.

Voucher and tuition tax credit programs also deprive students of rights and protections they are guaranteed in public schools. Despite receiving public money, private schools that accept voucher funds are not subject to all federal civil rights laws and do not face the same public accountability standards that all public schools must meet, including those in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

¹ See e.g., *Legislative Audit Bureau, Test Score Data for Pupils in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (Report 4 of 5)*, 17 (Aug. 2011); U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report* (June 2010); Witte, Wolf, et al., *MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report* (Apr. 2010); Plucker, et al., *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Summary Report 1998-2004* (Feb. 2006).

(ESEA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Title IX gender equality provisions, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In addition, voucher and tuition tax credit programs lack proper oversight, accountability, or internal controls. Most of these programs are plagued with accountability problems, primarily because they do not have to adhere to the same standards set for public schools.

Furthermore, voucher and tuition tax credit programs primarily fund private religious schools. To protect both the religious freedom of taxpayers and the autonomy of religious schools, many of our coalition members sincerely object to taxpayer money being used to fund religious education.

For these reasons and more, NCPE members oppose any amendment that would support the creation of a private school voucher or tuition tax credit program.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
AASA: The School Superintendents Association
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
AFL-CIO American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
Disciples Justice Action Network
Education Law Center
Equal Partners in Faith
Feminist Majority Foundation
Hindu American Foundation
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Institute for Science and Human Values, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of United Latin American Citizens
NAACP
National Association for Bilingual Education

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Urban League
People For the American Way
Secular Coalition for America
School Social Work Association of America
Southern Education Foundation
Southern Poverty Law Center
Texas Faith Network
Texas Freedom Network
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ, Justice & Witness Ministries
Women of Reform Judaism