



TO: The Honorable Members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

FROM: Education Stakeholders and Interested Parties

DATE: January 19, 2018

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 2 – Education Savings Accounts, i.e. school vouchers

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), a new and worse iteration of school vouchers proposed in SB 2, siphon precious taxpayer resources from already financially struggling public schools to private schools and other private educational service organizations that are not accountable to the public for their decisions and results. Whereas traditional public education entities have strict requirements for public meetings, transparency, governance, academic achievement, testing/reporting and financial accountability, such requirements don't exist and wouldn't exist for entities receiving tax dollars from ESA vouchers.

ESA vouchers undermine Pennsylvania's responsibility to ensure every student in every community has equal access to public education. School districts in Pennsylvania are already underfunded. SB 2 would take money from school districts where 90% of students attend, and provide it to private schools and companies in an ill-conceived duplicative program that creates yet another taxpayer funded system of education. Not only would school districts' state aid be sent to unaccountable private schools, but such money could also be diverted to higher education post-graduation, tutoring services and other "qualified education expenses" – not even ensuring students receive full-time educational instruction. Taxpayers shouldn't have to fund a public and private system of education. Further, ESA vouchers present ample opportunities for fraud and abuse as seen in other states which have implemented ESA voucher programs.

ESA vouchers will harm educational services provided to children with disabilities. Like previous voucher proposals, legislation to implement ESA vouchers lack adequate protections for students with disabilities, requirements that participating entities adhere to the federal IDEA law and will not even ensure that such entities accept special education students.

ESA vouchers represent bad public policy that will have negative consequences for students, schools, taxpayers, and communities. Further, the proposed scheme lacks public support. There are more pressing problems within public education that deserve the attention of policymakers, like reducing class size, ensuring more individualized attention, increasing parental involvement, increasing school funding, putting electives like foreign languages, art and music back in the curriculum, and other proven strategies for school improvement. Continuing to attempt to pass ever worse versions of school vouchers that have proven time and again to lack the support of Pennsylvanians is a poor use of time. This proposal will only serve to chip away at Pennsylvania's public education system.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to oppose any legislation, particularly Senate Bill 2, that relates to education savings accounts. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Teachers – Pennsylvania
Disability Rights Pennsylvania
Education Law Center
Education Rights Network
Education Voters Pennsylvania
Keystone Progress
Keystone Research Center
Keystone State Education Coalition
League of Women Voters Pennsylvania
One Pennsylvania
PA Association of Intermediate Units
PA Association of Rural and Small Schools
PA Association of School Administrators
PA Association of School Business Officials
PA Budget and Policy Center
PA Council of Churches
PA Interfaith Impact Network
PA Partnerships for Children
PA Principals Association
PA School Boards Association
PA State Education Association
The Public Interest Law Center
SEIU Pennsylvania – State Council
SEIU – 32BJ