

The National Coalition

for

Public Education

March 22, 2013

Re: Oppose Any Amendment to S. Con. Res 8 that Would Create a Private School Voucher Program

Dear Senator:

The undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) write to express our strong opposition to any amendments to the Fiscal 2014 Senate Budget Resolution (S. Con Res. 8) that would create 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.

At a time when Congress is attempting to reduce spending, it is poor public policy to funnel taxpayer funds away from public schools and toward private schools. 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 schools¹ 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 non-discriminatory 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 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Title IX gender equality provisions, IDEA, and ESEA.

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

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).

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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 opposes any amendment that would create a private school voucher or tuition tax credit program.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
AFL-CIO American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
Americans for Democratic Action
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
ASPIRA Association, Inc.
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
Disciples Justice Action Network
Equal Partners in Faith
Family and Children's Ministries, Disciples Home Missions, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Feminist Majority
Hindu American Foundation
Institute for Science and Human Values
Interfaith Alliance
International Reading Association
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
NA'AMAT USA
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women National Education Association
National Organization for Women

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National PTA

National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition

National Rural Education Association

National School Boards Association

People For the American Way

Public Education Network

Secular Coalition for America

School Social Work Association of America

Southern Poverty Law Center

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

United Church of Christ, Justice & Witness Ministries

Women of Reform Judaism