



February 2, 2017

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I write to express our strong opposition to private school voucher schemes. This week, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce will hold a hearing to examine school choice. During this discussion, we urge you to consider the policies and best practices that will benefit all students and uphold civil rights protections.

AAUW has long opposed diverting public funds to private or religious elementary and secondary schools, which are not required to follow civil rights laws - including Title IX. Voucher programs are particularly egregious because they are proven to be ineffective, are unaccountable to the taxpayers, and deprive students of rights provided to public school. The objective evidence does not support spending millions of dollars of precious taxpayer funding on private school voucher programs. Congress would better serve *all* children by using funds to make our public schools stronger and safer, rather than creating a new voucher program.

Private school voucher recipients do not face the same public accountability standards that are required of all public schools. As a result, several reports have identified serious efficacy and accountability problems. According to multiple studies, students offered vouchers fail to outperform their public school counterparts in reading and math. This was particularly evident in students from D.C.,¹ Milwaukee,² and Cleveland³ school voucher programs. This was also reinforced through a 2010 U.S. Department of Education report analyzing the D.C. voucher program. The report found that there was “no conclusive evidence that the [voucher] program affected student achievement.”⁴ Overall, students participating in the D.C. voucher program are actually less likely to have access to resources such as ESL programs, learning support and special needs programs, tutors, counselors, cafeterias, and nurse’s offices than students not in the program, not to mention their civil rights. Voucher programs have consistently failed to improve academic achievement for students and lack mechanisms to hold schools accountable.

Despite receiving public funds, private voucher schools are not required to abide by all federal civil rights laws, including Title IX. As a result, private voucher schools often fail to meet the needs of students with disabilities, denying them admission or subjecting them to inappropriate or excessive suspensions or expulsions. Similarly, private voucher schools do not have to comply with the same teacher standards, curriculum, or testing requirements of public schools. Students who accept vouchers lose critical rights and protections enforced at public schools.

Schools that do not provide students with these basic civil rights protections should not be funded with taxpayer dollars.

As the committee moves forward with discussions on private school vouchers, Congress must ensure that public dollars continue to support public education and that the recipients of these funds adhere to all civil rights laws. Cosponsorship and votes associated with these issues may be included in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record for the 115th Congress*. If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Pam Yuen, government relations coordinator, at 202/785-7712.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President for Government Relations and Advocacy

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (June 2010). Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>.

² Witte, Wolf, et al., MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report (Apr. 2010); Legislative Audit Bureau, Test Score Data for Pupils in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (Report 4 of 5), 17 (Aug. 2011) (“The project’s five-year longitudinal study shows no significant difference in the performance of Choice and similar MPS pupils after four years of participation.”).

³ Plucker, et al., *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Summary Report 1998-2004*. Feb. 2006. http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/resources/200602_Clev_Tech_Final.pdf.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (June 2010). Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>.