



May 17, 2018

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the over 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. Private school vouchers are selective in their acceptance and do not provide the same rights and protections to students as their public schools counterparts. These policies are particularly detrimental to black women and girls working to earn an education. On this, the 64th anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court case, I urge you to oppose all forms of private school vouchers.

AAUW supports high-quality public education and believes it is the foundation of a democratic society and the key to economic prosperity, college and career readiness, and gender equality.<sup>i</sup> AAUW advocates for school compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws, including Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs, Title VI, which prohibits race discrimination in federal programs, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Public education is open and nondiscriminatory in its acceptance of all students and continues to serve as a unifying factor among the diverse range of students in our society. In particular, education has long been an essential tool of equality, especially for black women and girls across the country. Their role in fighting for integration pre- and post-*Brown* cannot be overstated.

The decision in *Brown v. Board*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that the state laws segregating schools were unconstitutional, was a historic case for educational equality in the United States. Yet, efforts to fulfill the promise of *Brown*, particularly on behalf of black women and girls, have been slow. In recent decades, “massive resistance” to school integration has given way to several seemingly innocuous school choice programs, like private school vouchers. Although contemporary voucher programs are “race-neutral,” they can still exacerbate existing racial and class segregation. These policies among others have and continue to contribute to the continued segregation of U.S. schools with disproportionate impact on black women and girls.

The history of private school vouchers in the United States is deeply rooted in the legacy of segregation and AAUW has long opposed diverting public funds to private or religious elementary and secondary schools, which are often not required to follow civil rights laws. Despite receiving public funds, private voucher schools are not always required to abide by all federal civil rights laws, including, for example, Title IX or IDEA.

Although promoted as “school choice,” private school vouchers do not provide real “choice” for students and parents. Not all public school students can gain access to a voucher school, as voucher schools are permitted to maintain their admissions standards and, thus, can essentially reject any public school student

they choose. Students in private voucher schools can also be denied Title IX enforcement by the U.S. Department of Education and the federal courts even when schools fail to create safe climates for students. Private voucher schools also often fail to meet the needs of students with disabilities, denying them admission or subjecting them to inappropriate or excessive school discipline, such as suspensions or expulsions.

Students who accept vouchers lose critical rights and protections enforced at public schools. Private school voucher programs that have proven to be ineffective, unaccountable to the taxpayers, and deprive students of basic civil rights should not be funded with taxpayer dollars.

As the House of Representatives continues to pursue its legislative agenda, Congress must oppose all forms of vouchers that divert public dollars away from public education. This includes opposing the inclusion of any amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) FY2019 that would create a private school vouchers. In particular, AAUW opposes H.R. 5199 and its possible inclusion in the NDAA, which would use Impact Aid to fund Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) for military-connected students. AAUW also opposes the reauthorization of, expansion of, or appropriations of funds to renew the D.C. voucher program. The D.C. program, in particular, has proven ineffective and unaccountable to taxpayers and has failed to improve educational outcomes for participating students.<sup>ii</sup> Public dollars should fund public schools that serve all students. Any legislative proposals that redirects critical funds away public education and strips students of their civil rights must be opposed.

The contributions of black women and girls are often forgotten in the broad strokes of American history despite their essential role in the fight for equal access to education. On this, the 64th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision, additional action at the federal level must be taken to ensure high-quality public education is fully available to all women and girls. That begins by opposing all private school voucher schemes.

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, please contact Pam Yuen, senior government relations coordinator at 202/785-7712.

Sincerely,



Deborah J. Vagins  
Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Research

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<sup>i</sup> AAUW. (2017). *AAUW Issues: School Vouchers*. <https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/public-policy/aauw-issues/vouchers/>.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, GAO-13-805. (2013). *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/660/658416.pdf>.