



GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE OF ILLINOIS

16 May 2017

Dear Governor Rauner, Chairman Meeks and Superintendent Smith:

Both President Trump and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos have publicly stated their support for the use of federal funds for voluntary school voucher programs at the state level.

As such, we are writing to enter into the public record that we oppose the creation of any program that will divert public funds from the public school system to be used to pay tuition, fees or other costs at private and religious schools—whether in the form of vouchers or scholarship tax credits, other than that which already exists under current state and federal law to provide students with disabilities with a Free and Appropriate public education.

The majority of private schools are run by religious groups, and using public dollars to fund religion runs counter to the principles on which our country was founded and is in direct violation of the Illinois Constitution, Article X, Section 3, which states:

“Neither the General Assembly nor any county, city, town, township, school district, or other public corporation, shall ever make any appropriation or pay from any public fund whatever, anything in aid of any church or sectarian purpose, or to help support or sustain any school, academy, seminary, college, university, or other literary or scientific institution, controlled by any church or sectarian denomination whatever; nor shall any grant or donation of land, money, or other personal property ever be made by the State, or any such public corporation, to any church, or for any sectarian purpose.”

Strong public schools are at the heart of our democracy and the communities in our districts. They are the only place that must educate all students regardless of income, race, health, sexual orientation or academic ability. Our constituents repeatedly tell us they want public investments in their public schools, and diverting public dollars from schools that are already underfunded is fundamentally incompatible with your and our effort to address our inadequate and inequitable education funding system. Vouchers will perpetuate and deepen the gross inequities in education that plague Illinois.

Therefore, we ask you to make the same public commitment that we have: publicly disavow the creation of any program that diverts public funding to pay for private and religious schools.

Signed,

Representative Kelly Cassidy

Representative Robyn Gabel

Representative Will Guzzardi

Representative Camille Lilly

Representative Robert Martwick

Representative Christian Mitchell

Representative Elaine Nekritz

Representative Emanuel Chris Welch

Representative Ann Williams

Senator Omar Aquino

Senator Melinda Bush

Senator Kimberly Lightford

Senator Heather Steans

*Representative Carol Ammons, 103rd District
Representative Kelly Cassidy, 14th District
*Representative Linda Chapa LaVia, 83rd District
*Representative Barbara Flynn Currie, 25th District
*Representative Mary Flowers, 31st District
Representative Robyn Gabel, 18th District
Representative Will Guzzardi, 39th District
*Representative Michael Halpin, 72nd District
*Representative Sonya Harper, 6th District
*Representative Greg Harris, 13th District
Representative Camille Lilly, 78th District
*Representative Theresa Mah, 2nd District
Representative Robert Martwick, 19th District
Representative Christian Mitchell, 26th District
*Representative Anna Moeller, 43rd District
Representative Elaine Nekritz, 57th District
*Representative Juliana Stratton, 5th District
*Representative Silvana Tabares, 21st District
Representative Emanuel Chris Welch, 7th District
Representative Ann Williams, 11th District

Senator Omar Aquino, 2nd District
*Senator Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant
*Senator Daniel Biss, 9th District
Senator Melinda Bush, 31st District
*Senator Cristina Castro, 22nd District
*Senator John Cullerton, 6th District
*Senator Bill Cunningham, 18th District
*Senator Don Harmon, 39th District
Senator Kimberly Lightford, 4th District
*Senator Iris Martinez, 20th District
*Senator Laura Murphy, 28th District
*Senator Kwame Raoul, 13th District
Senator Heather Steans, 7th District
*Senator Patricia Van Pelt, 5th District