



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 737 Alternative Education Options – Right to Learn and Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today Programs (Right to Learn Act of 2023)

POSITION: Oppose

BY: Nancy Soreng – President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) opposes public funding for vouchers or other aid for private and parochial schools. This bill, *HB 737 Alternative Education Options - Right to Learn and Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today Programs (Right to Learn Act of 2023)*, is another form of providing state aid for nonpublic education. The state's primary responsibility is to support public school students, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language, and physical and academic ability. **The LWVMD strongly opposes HB 737**, which would codify these programs and require the governor to appropriate \$10 million per year, redirecting millions of public dollars away from public schools, toward nonpublic schools.

This is the wrong time to be sending more money to private and parochial schools when public schools are struggling to cope with the lasting impact of COVID-19, staff shortages, and the need to provide extra services to help students catch up. After a delay, public schools are beginning to receive the increased funding allocated under the Blueprint, but they are by no means fully funded. Now is not the time to mandate more money to nonpublic schools. We need to support all our public schools, not just a few nonpublic schools.

In addition to redirecting public funds to nonpublic schools HB 737 would establish a Right to Learn Program, attempting to define a 'failing school' using the current Star Rating System. There is [no evidence](#) to support the use of the Star system as a reliable or valid method of assessing school success or academic performance, even before the many additional stressors introduced since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, an [analysis of the Maryland five-star rating system](#) from the [Baltimore Education Research Consortium](#) documented the relationship between report card rating and the percentage of a school's economically disadvantaged students. No high-poverty school earned a five-star rating under the Maryland system thus reinforcing the influence of poverty rather than capturing the value added by educators. The League urges legislators not to encode punitive and misleading labels for schools based on inaccurate and outdated metrics.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland with 1500+ members urges the committee to give an unfavorable report to HB 737.