



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 704 Primary and Secondary Education - Education Savings Account Program - Established

POSITION: Oppose

BY: Linda T. Kohn - 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 704 Primary and Secondary Education - Education Savings Account Program - Established, 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 704**, which would increase state aid to nonpublic schools.

This bill creates a voucher program since it allows the parent of an eligible student to use state funds for nonpublic school tuition, online learning programs, private tutoring, and other contracted services. Under this program, the state would deposit 75% of the per pupil state and local funding into a parent's Education Savings Account (ESA) for each eligible student. This includes students whose family's income is less than or equal to 500% of the federal poverty level for the previous calendar year. If the family's income is over 500% of the federal poverty level, 50% of the state and local per pupil funding would be deposited into the educational savings account. The school district would have to reimburse the state for the amount provided for the student's account, placing an undue burden on local school districts. Parents could add pretax money to the Education Savings Account.

There are a number of concerns with ESAs¹:

- ESAs benefit students already enrolled in private schools.
- There are no estimates of the impact of ESAs on the funding for local school districts, especially those serving our most vulnerable students. Nor are there estimates of the indirect costs (administration, regulation and oversight, disseminating information, transporting students) of implementing ESAs.
- There is no accountability for the quality of the educational program offered by eligible schools or the services provided by private tutoring and educational providers that

¹ Welner, K.G. (2008). *NeoVouchers: The emergence of tuition tax credits for private schooling*. Rowman & Littlefield.

benefit from ESAs.

- The bill ignores the potential to exacerbate economic and racial stratification and segregation by shifting more students to an already highly stratified and segregated private school sector.
- The effectiveness of vouchers is mixed, with largely null to negative results, particularly in student learning outcomes as measured by test scores.²

This is the wrong time to be sending money to private and parochial schools when Maryland is facing a structural deficit. Public schools have long been under and inequitably funded, as the Kirwan Commission documented in 2020.³ Although The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (HB1300) is currently funded, Maryland will need additional revenue beginning in FY2026. We need to use our resources to support all our public schools, not just a few nonpublic schools.

We urge the committee to give an unfavorable report to HB 704.

² Shand, R. & Levin, H. M. (2021). *Estimating a price tag for school vouchers*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved 3/3/2024, from <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/voucher-costs>

³ Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education (December 2020). *Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://dls.maryland.gov/policy-areas/commission-on-innovation-and-excellence-in-education>