



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 675 Primary and Secondary Education - Education Savings Account Program – Established (Maryland Universal School Choice Act)

POSITION: Oppose

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: March 6, 2024

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) opposes public funding for vouchers or other aid for private and parochial schools. This bill, **HB 675 Primary and Secondary Education - Education Savings Account Program – Established (Maryland Universal School Choice Act)**, 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 675**, which would increase state aid to nonpublic schools.

This is the wrong time to be sending more money to private and parochial schools when the state is facing a structural deficit. Public schools have long been under and inequitably funded, as the Kirwan Commission documented in 2020.¹ We need to use our resources to support all our public schools, not just a few nonpublic schools.

This program would provide money for nonpublic school tuition, online learning programs, private tutoring, and other contracted services. Under this program, the state would deposit into a parent's Education Savings Account 100% of the per pupil state and local funding. The county would have to reimburse the state for the local 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 Education Savings Accounts²:

¹ 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>

² Welner, K.G. (2008). *NeoVouchers: The emergence of tuition tax credits for private schooling*. Rowman & Littlefield.

- ESAs benefit students already enrolled in private schools.
- There are no estimates of the impact of ESAs on 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 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.³

We urge the committee to give an unfavorable report to HB 675.

³ 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>