

READ THE ROOM: FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS (NOT PRIVATE)

As reported by Spotlight PA, "A coalition with wealthy backers is pushing Pennsylvania lawmakers to use public dollars to create tuition vouchers so K-12 students can attend private schools." And, state Senate President Pro Tempore Kim Ward "is ready to make Lifeline Scholarships – and increasing current tax credit programs – her top priority."

This political payback has overtaken the Pennsylvania budget negotiations, while the Commonwealth Court decision in the school funding lawsuit, a clear mandate that lawmakers must fund a "thorough and efficient system of *public education* for all PA students," has been practically ignored.

LET'S BE CLEAR: THERE IS NO WAY TO CREATE A PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER SYSTEM THAT DOES NOT TAKE AWAY MONEY FROM PUBLIC EDUCATION.

TAXPAYER DOLLARS TO PRIVATE AND RELIGIOUS SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAMS LIKE THE "LIFELINE" SCHOLARSHIPS MEANS:

- Less money for public schools with finite resources available;
- Higher property taxes when districts receive less from the state; and
- Money to wealthy families to send kids to private and religious schools because the programs are not based on need.

TAXPAYER DOLLARS TO VOUCHER PROGRAMS WILL NOT:

- Close the school funding gap because dollars to private and religious schools divert money from and harm public schools;
- Remedy PA's broken and unconstitutional school funding system; or
- Improve student outcomes because there is no accountability for the private and religious schools that will receive these taxpayer dollars.

THIS IRONY SHOULD NOT BE LOST ON ANYONE FOLLOWING PENNSYLVANIA POLITICS:

A plan to shift funding away from public schools and into private schools after a court ruling that the inequity of Pennsylvania's long-underfunded public education system violates our Constitution.

Pennsylvania already has a **\$340 million per year** EITC/OSTC private school voucher program. Note that state law explicitly prohibits the collection of information about who benefits from these programs, so there is no evidence that EITC/OSTC programs even work.

Private and religious schools that receive EITC/OSTC funding are allowed to discriminate against and refuse to enroll students for any reason, including disability, race, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. The same would be true of a new "Lifeline" scholarship program.

We don't need a new school voucher program in Pennsylvania, we need the Legislature to fund our public schools.