

MORE THAN THREE WEEKS AND COUNTING.

The state budget was passed in early July by both chambers of the legislature. But Republican leadership in the Senate refuses to send it on to the governor for signature, even though it is a budget that they put together themselves.

All because of one issue: private school vouchers. They want to force Governor Shapiro to backtrack on his promise to line-item veto a new private school voucher program. And they are willing to hold up funding for public schools and vital community services to do it.

Why would some lawmakers be willing to harm their own constituents in the short term for a foot-in-the-door school privatization program, all the while ignoring the mandate from the Commonwealth Court to remedy an unconstitutional funding system for public education?

BEFORE EXPLORING THAT QUESTION, IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER JUST A FEW OF THE THINGS THAT ARE WRONG WITH THE VOUCHER PROGRAM THEY ARE PUSHING SO HARD FOR:

- The privatization program would divert money that would otherwise go to our underfunded public schools, sending it instead to private and religious schools that can discriminate in admissions and do not have to show that they are adequately educating students. To those arguing that the \$100 million for the vouchers program did not divert dollars from public schools, explain why that same budget cut \$100 million requested by the governor for school mental health services.
- This voucher program would be on top of existing and equally unproven voucher-like programs (EITC and OSTC) that already divert \$220 million in taxpayer dollars that, again, could otherwise be going to close the unconstitutional public school funding gap.
- The voucher program is devoid of any accountability or oversight of existing or future private and religious schools that would ensure they're improving outcomes for students or following anti-discrimination laws, which means, for example, that those schools could discriminate in admission against students with disabilities.

Billionaires and private school voucher zealots from inside and outside Pennsylvania will continue to put pressure on Governor Shapiro and legislators for years to come. Our lawmakers, from the governor on down, must recognize this effort for what it is: the first step in a Betsy DeVos-backed long-term plan to replace our public school system with taxpayer-funded vouchers.

WHERE DOES THIS PUSH FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAMS ORIGINATE, AND WHAT WOULD IT REALLY MEAN FOR PENNSYLVANIA IN THE LONG RUN?

SEE PART TWO OF THIS PA SCHOOLS WORK TALKING POINTS MEMO TOMORROW.