

## THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

PO Box 8453, Columbia, SC, 29202, (803) 251-2726, [www.lwvsc.org](http://www.lwvsc.org)

### LWVSC POSITION ON SCHOOL VOUCHERS/TUITION TAX CREDITS AND PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

February 2008

#### Brief Background

Experimental programs designed to use public funds to pay for all or part of the costs of students' tuition at private or religious schools have been implemented largely in urban sites, including Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York City and Washington, DC. Efforts in South Carolina, funded by out-of-state school privatization groups, would legislate private-school voucher and tuition tax credit programs for statewide implementation.

To date, empirical research has failed to yield solid and credible evidence that supports the claims of school choice advocates. For example, the U. S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) reviewed privately funded voucher programs in NYC, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., and found no significant differences in general student achievement. Another GAO report on the Washington, D.C. voucher program found that students are at greater risk under the voucher program, as many voucher schools do not meet health and safety standards and students are likely to be placed in classrooms with teachers who lack a college degree or license to teach. Florida's programs had such little oversight that fraud and abuse were rampant. The myth that vouchers will save money for a state is debunked in the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice review of a Friedman Foundation report. The review found the report was filled with errors and omissions and did not make a sufficient case for the positive fiscal impact of a voucher program.

The LWVSC opposes use of state funds for private school tuition. Opposition is linked to LWV support for equal access to education and support for desegregation as a means of promoting equal access. The League is uneasy about the negative impact that school vouchers/tuition tax credits may have on public schools by encouraging flight, particularly from desegregated schools.

#### What You Should Know

##### School Voucher/Tuition Tax Credit Legislation

Unsuccessful legislation has been filed yearly in the S.C. General Assembly since the 2003-2004 session. Bills keep the basic premise and language, though they contain changes regarding scope, funding and allocation formula. Currently, we remain on alert that legislation may be introduced in 2008, and that supporters of choice outside the public schools may try to attach tax credits and/or vouchers to that bill, as they did in 2007 with the failed effort to pass the S.C. Educational Opportunity Scholarship Act (S457; H3484).

##### **Public School Choice (PSC) Legislation--H4391. Sponsors: Reps. E.H. Pitts, Cotty and Mulvaney**

Supt. of Education Rex's 2008 PSC Bill would, beginning in School Year 2009-10, allow within-district-line transfers, with questionable provision of transportation. The PSC idea has been around in various forms for some time in S.C. (e.g., Montessori programs, magnet schools, single-gender classrooms). Supt. Rex claims that this will not lead to re-segregation, but where a student lives will determine whether or not a student has an opportunity for choice. State funding is critical for carrying out PSC; without it, this option is not available for every student.

#### Tell Your Legislators

##### LWVSC opposes education voucher and tuition tax credits because:

- South Carolina's public schools deserve continuing support. Most South Carolinians want increased investment in what works in the classrooms--quality teachers, smaller classes and high expectations for all students. A liberal subsidized entitlement program would only compete for S.C. schools' already scarce resources.

- Vouchers are about subsidies. The issue is whether taxpayers should subsidize existing private schools and encourage emergence of new subsidized private schools without adequate assurance of quality and accountability. South Carolina cannot afford to go down that path.
- Vouchers could become tools for cultural division and re-segregation. Private schools have always existed, but not at taxpayer expense. During the last 50 years, we have reduced segregation and enhanced equal opportunity in public schools. We should not embrace a system that could reverse what we have worked hard to achieve.

LWSC supports H4391 so long as the General Assembly provides adequate funding and support to school districts, e.g., to offset the costs of transporting students to and from district choice programs and voluntary open enrollment programs, and to address problems encountered by “sending” and “receiving” schools.