



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF NEW JERSEY

Assembly Commerce and Economic Development Committee
February 3, 2011
A. 2810 Opportunity Scholarship Act

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey opposes A.2810. The League believes that a public, universal education is essential to a representative democracy. It calls on such democracies to invest their resources in public education and that is what New Jersey should be doing, not diverting resources to private schools. We have a very clear position, reached through consensus of our members in 1995 and reexamined in 2007 in opposition to using public funds through vouchers or direct payments, tax credits or other fiscal incentives to support students attending non-public schools.

Using public money for private schools has fiscal and educational consequences.

Private and parochial schools do not have to teach to the core curriculum content standards. There is no assurance that the schools taking voucher students are providing a high-quality education. The only data we will have from this pilot is the results of the grade level state assessment of voucher students. We have no assessment of the public education being provided by the private school. There is no consistent data from other large scale voucher programs that show those attending nonpublic schools outperform those with equivalent backgrounds left in the public schools.

Private and parochial schools do not have to meet the intense state scrutiny and mandates that public schools undergo.

The eligible private schools will probably not include special education students, since parents must sign a waiver releasing the school from services required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. If charter schools enrollments are any indication, the student population of the private and parochial schools will not mirror the demographics of the community (special education, English as a second language and free school lunch populations). This leaves the public schools with fewer resources to educate students with greater needs.

New Jersey should invest our scarce public resources in public entities. The 20,000 vouchers over 5 years of the pilot program will cost the state treasury upwards of 360 million dollars of corporate business taxes. Every one seems to agree that the State is broke. Income from our major tax sources has not rebounded from the recession and there is insufficient support for any new taxes to provide additional revenue. Even without additional spending New Jersey will face another austere budget. That means additional cuts in FY 2012 and future budgets; cuts that are likely to impact services from health care to infrastructure to safety net programs. The lost corporate business tax money is money available for these budgetary needs. The “savings” proponents are

touting is constitutionally dedicated to property tax relief. It is not a revenue neutral program when examining what the money can be used for.

New Jersey can't afford allowing any child who receives vouchers to keep eligibility until completion of grade 8 or 12 (whichever occurs first) even if family no longer meets the income guidelines.

New Jersey can't afford giving 25% vouchers to students already enrolled in a private or parochial schools in the targeted districts. These students are not being "saved" from chronically failing public schools.

This is not about improving "chronically failing schools" or even rescuing children from chronically failing schools. This is simply about giving parents choice. Parents already have public school choice. Parents can send their children out of district to another public school with available space or to a charter schools. The League has supported those public school choices. We cannot support using public money for private schools.

Testimony presented by
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