

# public citizens for children + youth

Dear Education Committee Member,

Pennsylvania School Districts are in a crisis of historic proportions. Not since the Great Depression of the 1930's has the public education system in the Commonwealth faced such dire circumstances. Districts are looking down the barrel of a pandemic-imposed loss of nearly a \$1 billion in local revenues while having to shell out almost a billion dollars for unexpected pandemic bills for personal protective equipment and spiraling cyber charter costs.

On Monday, you will be holding a hearing on Senate Bill 1230 which establishes an entirely new half a billion dollar state program for parents who've chosen religious and private education for their children.

Senate Bill 1230 cynically skirts the ire of public school parents by making them eligible for a \$1,000 voucher. Yet, the bill's intended beneficiaries become obvious with its laundry list of allowable voucher expenditures for computers, curricula, counseling, special education services and subject matter testing, all of which public schools provide their students for free.

Further, in line with the times, where it's vogue to find ways to escape paying taxes or tapping public funds with little accountability, the bill hands out \$1,000 to parents regardless of income, without any evidence of need or proof that the parent has any eligible educational expenses.

Senator Ward, the bill's prime sponsor claims this budget busting bill is urgently needed to "get students back on track" yet the bill permits parents to hold on to taxpayer voucher funds, unspent, for years.

Pennsylvania already operates two novel education funding programs that offer parents one of the most robust school choice landscapes in America. To support those measures, nearly \$2.2 billion in state and local funding is peeled away from public schools for charter school tuition payments and the cover of the lost state tax revenue from corporate contributions that primarily benefit private and religious



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schools. This latest edition of the education funding diversion campaign would bring the total of funds that could otherwise meet Pennsylvania school funding crisis to \$2.7 billion.

Against this backdrop, its blatantly irresponsible that any Pennsylvania lawmaker is advancing legislation to create yet another education funding stream that will divert state funds from public schools.

Meanwhile school districts, which educate 90% of school-aged children in the state face a gaping deficit and so too, does the Commonwealth. More than \$5 billion in recurring state expenses have yet to be backed by any revenues for the current fiscal year.

It's downright insulting to nine in ten households in this state with school-aged children that instead of moving legislation to help public schools meet the expenses of safely re-opening for 1.7 million students, lawmakers will waste time exploring ways to craft a state funded, personal expense account for parents of the most privileged 200,000 students in the Commonwealth.

Senate Bill 1230 is precisely the kind of wasteful state spending that voters despise, and it is exactly the wrong answer to what the parents of students in Pennsylvania need the state to be doing right now.

We urge all members of the Senate Education Committee to reject this measure.

Sincerely,



Donna Cooper,  
Executive Director