



**Pennsylvania State Senate
Senate Education Committee Members
Comments on Senate Bill 1230**

**Mark DiRocco, Executive Director
The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
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Chairman Langerholc, Chairman Dinniman, and distinguished members of the Senate Education Committee. The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) offers the following comments regarding Senate Bill 1230 that is to be discussed on October 5, 2020.

PASA represents over 900 commissioned officers and school leaders including Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Intermediate Unit Executive Directors, Assistant Intermediate Unit Executive Directors, and cabinet level administrators. Our members make recommendations to school boards on critical school governance matters, administer federal, state, and local laws and policies, and oversee all aspects of school operations. PASA members often have the best overall understanding of school issues as they must have in-depth knowledge to lead their staff, board, and community.

PASA is opposed to Senate Bill 1230 because it is another voucher scheme that will funnel public dollars to non-public schools and educational entities. The bill proposes to use \$500 billion of federal CARES funds to give scholarships to parents of children who are in need of instructional services to help them recover from learning losses as a result of COVID-19 closures and related issues. We understand that the school closures caused a serious disruption to student learning last spring, and many students will need assistance to close learning gaps. However, giving parents funds to seek out their own assistance is an ineffective strategy at best. There is no credible study that has proven voucher/scholarship/tax credit programs to be effective for children. In fact, some studies have shown them to be detrimental to the long-term learning of students.

As public school leaders we often are reminded that public schools need to be held accountable to the taxpayers and state officials for the academic progress of students and the fiscal management of district resources. Yet, Senate Bill 1230 provides no accountability for the scholarship funds provided to the parents. There is a brief reference to parents receiving a receipt for their expenses, but there is no audit or reports issued regarding the use of the funds. We don't understand why the state would issue a half billion dollars to individuals with no record keeping, reporting, or assessment as to how the money was spent.

Although Senate Bill 1230 does not limit the scholarship expenditures to non-public schools, the services described in the bill that parents can purchase for their children already exist within public schools. This bill is clearly designed to send money to non-public schools, which the majority of American and Pennsylvanian taxpayers oppose. Public dollars should be used for public schools and public services. Private schools and services are an option for individual families that taxpayers do not want to fund.

As you know, our public schools have worked hard to meet the challenges of the pandemic to open the 2020-2021 school year. Our school leaders have been appreciative of the level funding provided by the General Assembly and the Governor for the current school year. Unfortunately, with lower-than-expected property tax collections and the downturn in the economy, our school districts are struggling financially to meet the challenges of managing school operations while mitigating COVID-19. The \$500 million identified for the ESA Program in Senate Bill 1230 would do more good for more children if it was allocated to our public school districts.

PASA has been working with our national affiliate and other organizations to encourage Congress and the President to approve another COVID-19 stimulus package that would provide additional funding for K-12 schools. We had hoped that this money would be available at the beginning of the school year to offset the local revenue losses that are creating financial difficulty for our districts. Unfortunately, the gridlock in Washington D.C. has thwarted this effort and our public schools are suffering. PASA implores the General Assembly and the Governor to use the unallocated CARES funds by distributing the \$500 million through the traditional Title I funding formula as other CARES dollars were distributed. This way, policy makers could achieve the goal of helping all students in the Commonwealth.