



TO: MEMBERS OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FROM: LEADERS FOR EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFORM NETWORK – LEARN

DATE: OCTOBER 2, 2020

SUBJECT: SENATE BILL 1230 – BACK ON TRACK EDUCATIONAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

This legislation would create a new voucher funding program for Pennsylvania’s private and religious schools. It would allocate a significant share of Pennsylvania’s remaining COVID-19 Response Restricted Account – \$500 million – to a program that serves only 10% of the state’s students.

We oppose private school voucher programs in any form. Nonpublic schools are able to select their students and remove those who don’t fit the school’s mission, curriculum, or ideology. These schools are unaccountable to the public and to the taxpayers who will be forced to pay for a second, duplicative system of education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant financial hardship for school districts that have had to scale-up both in-person and virtual programs, restructure feeding programs to serve families in their homes and communities, purchase new equipment for students, hire additional teachers and meet new cleaning and personal protection protocols. We have done so in record time. We have also learned from our earliest attempts at virtual learning and have vastly improved our programs to include synchronous instruction, robust curricula, and ongoing support to meet the social and emotional needs of our students.

Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER), while welcome, have fallen short of district needs, and critical budget gaps remain. Local revenue collections are below pre-pandemic levels and state revenue is unlikely to recover for several years. The first responsibility of the General Assembly must be to close those gaps.

This bill rushes to create a massive new program without demonstrating a real need. Instead, COVID-19 Restricted Funds would be better used helping school districts address a real pandemic-related problem – the cost of unanticipated cyber charter enrollment growth – and keep local property taxes down.

For these reasons we urge you to oppose SB 1230.