



FOR RELEASE | September 5, 2024

Petition to Repeal Public Funding for Private Schools Certified for Ballot *Successful referendum means voters to decide fate of LB1402 voucher scheme*

LINCOLN – Nebraska voters will decide if they want to repeal legislation that diverts millions of public tax dollars to pay for private and religious schools. The Secretary of State’s Office today announced it has verified enough petition signatures submitted from the Support Our Schools Nebraska referendum effort and has certified the issue for the November ballot. The coalition of public school supporters seeks to repeal LB1402, which was passed by the legislature in April.

“Nebraskans have sent a clear message that they want their voices heard,” said Jenni Benson, president of Support Our Schools Nebraska. **“Voting to repeal LB1402 will ensure public funds are used to support public schools, not to pay for private schools. Nebraskans cannot afford to pay for two school systems.”**

This is the second time in as many years that Support Our Schools Nebraska has collected enough signatures to ensure voters have a say on legislation that diverts public tax dollars to pay for private schools. In 2023, the group gathered more than enough signatures to put the repeal of an earlier voucher bill, LB753, on the ballot. Knowing Nebraskans have voted three times previously to reject using public tax dollars for private schools, the bill’s sponsor introduced LB1402 as an end-run around the petition process. Many Nebraskans were appalled that LB1402 was passed to block citizens from voting on the issue while imposing a new, costly voucher scheme on taxpayers.

“OpenSky Policy Institute is proud to stand with our dedicated public school educators and partners in defending the right of Nebraskans to determine whether their hard-earned taxpayer dollars should fund private school tuition,” said Dr. Rebecca Firestone, Executive Director of the OpenSky Policy Institute. “We are confident that heading into this election, **Nebraska voters will look at examples like Iowa, where private schools increased their tuition rates more than 20% in grades that were eligible for scholarships, or Arizona, where lawmakers are trying to fill a \$1.4 billion budget deficit caused in part by a ballooning scholarship program, and vote to repeal Section 1 of LB 1402.** Nebraskans want meaningful work on our shared goals, like property tax relief, workforce development, and public safety. They want well-funded public education that ensures a bright future for our state. LB 1402 achieves none of these goals. We’re pleased Nebraskans will have a chance to let their voices be heard in November.”

“Time and again, voters across the country have rejected private school voucher schemes, which have proven to be expensive, unaccountable, and ineffective,” said Tim Royers, Support Our Schools Nebraska sponsor and president of the NSEA. “Taxpayers in states with vouchers are struggling with the skyrocketing cost of these programs, as well as with the lack of transparency and accountability. Iowa’s new voucher program costs are far exceeding initial estimates, growing to more than \$200 million this year. Arizona’s voucher program is a fiasco with the governor there saying it will likely bankrupt the state – and that it does not provide a better education for students. **Nebraskans can avoid those problems by voting to repeal LB1402’s voucher scheme at the ballot box this November.”**

“Nebraska public schools consistently rank in the Top 10 in the nation – and are the heart of our communities,” Benson said. “Ninety percent of all children in Nebraska attend our public schools. Taxpayer dollars should be invested in

strengthening our public schools. Now we redoubled our efforts to inform Nebraskans of the harm LB1402 will cause if it is not repealed.”

The Secretary of State’s certification means election officials have confirmed petition circulators met all constitutional requirements. In July, public school supporters submitted more than 86,000 signatures – far surpassing the 61,621 signatures needed. The group gathered signatures from voters in every one of Nebraska’s 93 counties, and handily exceeded the 38-county requirement with 5% of voters signing the petition in more than 60 counties.

Since last summer, the Support Our Schools Nebraska coalition has collected more than 200,000 signatures from Nebraskans who believe voters should decide whether public funds should be used to pay for private schools.

Several Nebraska organizations are advocating for the Repeal of LB1402, including the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, the Nebraska PTA, Nebraska Farmers Union, OpenSky Policy Institute, Holland Children’s Movement, Stand For Schools, the ARC of Nebraska, the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table, the Nebraska State Education Association and more.

For more information on the effort to repeal LB1402’s voucher scheme, please visit:

Website: <https://supportourschoolsnebraska.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SOSNebraska>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SOSNebraska>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sosnebraska/>

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