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Lawmakers Must Respect Voters and Reject Latest Voucher Scheme Bills

Nebraskans sent clear message: Use public funds for public, not private, schools

LINCOLN – For the third time in as many years, supporters of Nebraska public schools are coming together to remind state legislators that voters have already settled the issue and said NO to using public funds to pay for private schools.

LB509, a repeat of a 2023 voucher scheme that would hand out lavish income tax credits to benefit private schools, is in front of state senators this session and many taxpayers are frustrated that time is being taken up by an issue that only months ago was rejected by a large majority of Nebraska voters.

“Nebraskans have strongly rejected using public funds to pay for private schools,” said **Tim Royers, president of the Nebraska State Education Association**. “It’s time for our state leaders to listen to the voters and to focus on important issues – including efforts to address the teacher shortage in our state.”

Over the past two years, more than 200,000 Nebraskans signed petitions to repeal legislation using public funds for private schools. In 2023, the referendum petition to repeal LB753’s private school voucher scheme far exceeded the number of signatures needed to place the issue on the ballot. In a widely criticized move, the sponsor of LB753 bill then introduced LB1402 to take away Nebraskans’ right to vote on LB753. Both bills would have imposed a costly new private school voucher scheme on Nebraska taxpayers.

Royers said that some of those pushing voucher scheme bills have also “sought to demean hundreds of citizen volunteers and the intelligence of more than 200,000 petition signers by fabricating tales accusing Nebraska voters of ignorance, of not comprehending what they signed, and worse, of falsely accusing hundreds of educated volunteers of lying to gain signatures.”

One of those **volunteers, Jean McGuire, Lincoln**, confirmed that petition signers knew what they were signing and what they wanted.

“Over the past two years, I stood outside our public libraries to collect petition signatures to put the repeal of both LB753 and 1402 on the ballot,” said **McGuire**. “Voters sought out those of us collecting signatures and asked to sign the petition. We didn’t go to them – they came to us. The claims from voucher supporters that Nebraska voters did not know or understand what the petition was about is not true. Nebraskans knew what they were doing and the message they wanted to send to legislators was and remains clear: Do not divert public funds to pay for private schools.”

Dr. Rebecca Firestone, executive director of OpenSky Policy Institute, said the bill also presents budget concerns. “The Nebraska Legislature is currently undertaking the unenviable task of constructing a budget with a projected \$432 million deficit for the biennium,” **Firestone said**. “With so many important programs and budget line items to consider, there is no fiscal space for a \$25 million expense for private school scholarships that could accelerate to \$100 million over time. The budget should reflect the will and values of Nebraskans. LB 509 proposes new government spending with no measures of accountability, and it does not respect the will of the voters.”

Polls by the **Holland Children’s Movement** show Nebraskans are opposed to giving public dollars to private schools. Indeed, Nebraska voters have rejected public funds for private schools at the ballot box on four separate occasions since 1966.

“Public opinion research results of the Holland Children’s Institute continually demonstrate major opposition to utilizing taxpayer dollars to subsidize private schools (most recently 67% “opposed”) and these policies were rejected by voters (57%) on the November ballot,” **said Hadley Richters of the Holland Children’s Movement.** “The Legislature should spend less time attempting to ignore the will of the people and more time encouraging the highest-quality public school systems for the future of Nebraska’s children.”

"Nebraska voters made clear less than 100 days ago how they felt about public dollars being used to fund private schools. [LB 509](#) is yet another attempt to institute a voucher scheme and disregard the will of Nebraska voters,” said **Dr. Ferial Pearson, Board President of Stand For Schools**, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing public education in Nebraska. “Looking across the country, we know these programs have proven to be expensive, unaccountable, and ineffective at delivering improved academic outcomes. We will continue to fight for the public schools that serve 9 out of 10 Nebraska students.”

A near carbon-copy of LB 753 from 2023, LB509 would give a dollar-for-dollar tax credit to individuals and businesses that contribute money to private school tuition for some students – up to half that person or corporation's income tax liability, a more lucrative incentive than the state offers for any other type of charitable giving, including churches, food banks, and cancer research.

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