



***This letter was individually addressed and sent to all members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives***

***September 24, 2021***

Re: PSBA Opposition to School Vouchers, HB1254

Representative,

On behalf of the more than 5,000 school directors and administrators governing the state's school districts, intermediate units and career and technology centers, we are writing to **request your opposition to House Bill 1254 (Lewis DelRosso)** which mandate the creation of a voucher program in school districts and any amendments to the bill which would still allow for the creation of a voucher program. The bill contains several provisions which are highly concerning to our members and which will increase property taxes.

House Bill 1254 does not contemplate a necessary temporary closure of a school building due to localized COVID-19 and other disease outbreaks or even a non-health related issue, such as building damage from the recent tropical storm that swept through parts of Pennsylvania. Further, since the language in subsection (a) is so broad, one could reasonably argue that a school district using a Flexible Instructional Day could be said to have denied a resident student full-time in-person instruction since the term "full-time in-person instruction" is not defined nor elaborated upon in the bill.

Moreover, subsection (c) would make any resident student eligible for a voucher. This provision would extend eligibility much further than those students currently attending the school district who could be impacted by a school closure. For example, if a school district only closes one school building due to COVID-19 or a building issue, the bill would allow all district students to be eligible for a voucher even if those students were not impacted by the school closure. This provision also allows a student currently enrolled in a private school, charter school, or home education program which were not impacted at all by a school closure in the district to be eligible for a voucher since they would be considered "resident students" under the bill.

It is important to note that if the bill were to be passed into law, the voucher program would be implemented in the middle of the current school year, with little, if any options for school districts to absorb the impact of the lost revenue. Additionally, the bill contains no time limit on the applicability of the voucher program mandate. It would seem to be in-force permanently, long after the current pandemic ends or a building issue is resolved. There are also no provisions related to voucher termination other than remaining a resident of the school district.

Traditional public education entities have strict requirements for public meetings, transparency, governance, academic achievement, and financial accountability, and yet such requirements

don't exist and wouldn't exist for nonpublic entities receiving tax dollars under this bill. This voucher program places no meaningful transparency or accountability conditions on the receiving schools and contains no provision which will ensure that students using a voucher continue to receive in-person instruction. For example, a receiving school may be forced to change their instructional model due to COVID-19 or a building issue, yet there are no provisions in the bill which would terminate the receiving school's eligibility to receive voucher funds.

Overall, voucher programs like the one proposed in House Bill 1254, represent bad public policy that will have negative consequences for students, public schools, taxpayers, and communities. This is far from a solution that assists schools with the problems created by the pandemic, but rather takes needed resources out of public school classrooms and creates future revenue shortfalls that will require additional property tax increases or student program reductions. The legislature should be doing all it can to support public schools during this crisis, instead this bill would take advantage of current challenges to establish a permanent voucher program.

PSBA and its members remain committed to providing the best possible education to students as the pandemic lingers on, and in the future. We look forward to working with the General Assembly to identify solutions which would help school districts better achieve that goal. However, House Bill 1254 is not the solution, and we request your opposition.