**Sample Testimony on The Harms of School   
Voucher Programs**

*We encourage you to adapt the language within this document to fit the circumstances of your state. The portions highlighted in blue should be customized depending on your position and to whom you are providing testimony. While this testimony provides a relatively exhaustive overview of the arguments against vouchers, it is likely that not all the arguments will resonate with your legislature. We encourage you to mix, match, or expand upon the arguments to build a testimony that speaks to your audience.*

**[Your Name]**

**[Your Position/Title]**

**[Your Organization, if applicable]**

**[Date]**

Dear Chairperson [Name] and honorable members of the [Insert Committee Name],

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the critical issue of school vouchers. My name is [Your Name], and I am [your position, e.g., advocate/educator/parent/community member]. I am here to discuss the dangers of the school voucher program proposed in [Insert Bill Number]. While proponents of this program claim that it will offer parents more educational choice, the reality is that vouchers do not expand educational opportunities for all students. **Instead, they provide schools with choice and harm our students and communities in the process.**

*Voucher Programs Undermine Public Education.*

A thriving public education is integral to our democracy. Public schools serve as the backbone of our communities, connecting individuals from all backgrounds and providing a common good that all are entitled to. The claims that voucher programs are not costly or do not negatively impact our public education system are false. Vouchers divert much-needed resources away from public schools by reducing available state revenue. This is revenue that lawmakers should be investing in our public schools, which [90% of all students](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/06/us-public-private-and-charter-schools-in-5-charts/) attend. Additionally, enrollment losses driven by public school students transferring to private schools can lead to reduced budgets, increased financial strain, and exacerbated challenges for districts. This is because school districts have many fixed costs that they must pay regardless of student enrollment, such as transportation, utilities, and building maintenance. Public schools in voucher-implementing states have seen a significant decrease in funding, sometimes by as much as [12%](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/2023-splc-pfps-report.pdf) according to one 10-year study. This can lead to larger class sizes, fewer resources, and a decline in the quality of education for those students who choose to remain in public school. Furthermore, allowing families who already have the means to pay for private education to get a voucher creates an entirely new cost for the state. This is an additional expense that states simply cannot afford, as evidenced by states like Arizona, which faced a [$1.4 billion budget shortfall](https://www.propublica.org/article/arizona-school-vouchers-budget-meltdown) largely because of its universal voucher program.

*Voucher Programs Lead to Academic Decline.*

The most recent research has concluded that voucher programs have a negative impact on student achievement. [Two](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20160634) different [studies](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0162373717693108?journalCode=epaa) of Louisiana’s school voucher program found that students in the program performed worse on standardized tests compared with their peers in public schools. In fact, Louisiana’s voucher program had a significantly [larger negative impact](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/research-on-school-vouchers-suggests-concerns-ahead-for-education-savings-accounts/) on student achievement than COVID-19 interruptions to learning -- an impact which has persisted over multiple years. Similar effects have been found in [Indiana](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pam.22086), [Ohio](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/more-findings-about-school-vouchers-and-test-scores-and-they-are-still-negative/) and [Washington D.C](https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/5/29/21107280/d-c-s-private-school-voucher-program-hurt-low-income-students-math-test-scores-according-to-federal/). In some cases, students who leave voucher programs and return to public school have actually seen their academic achievement [improve](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0162373712461852?journalCode=epaa). Given the high rates at which students leave voucher programs -- [58% of students](https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/most-students-receive-florida-private-school-choice-scholarship-two-years-or-fewer-what-does-mean) in Florida left the voucher program within 2 years -- the effect of changing schools frequently on student achievement must also be considered. Changing schools can lead to academic decline, especially in core subjects like math and reading, and can cause severe social-emotional stress and challenges with social integration.

*Voucher Programs Lack Accountability.*

Private schools that accept vouchers are often not held to the same standards of accountability and transparency as public schools. Private schools are often not required to administer statewide standardized tests. Private schools also don’t participate in state-wide accountability systems, which are vital for tracking educational outcomes and holding schools and districts responsible for effectively educating all students. This means that the state has no way of knowing if private schools accepting vouchers are providing students with a high-quality education that prepares them for college and career. Additionally, the lack of proper state oversight and financial accountability means that lawmakers and the public are unable to ensure that public funds are being used appropriately and effectively for educational purposes. This lack of oversight can lead to fraud and the misuse of public funds, as happened in [North Carolina](https://www.ncjustice.org/analysis-nc-private-school-voucher-program/) where multiple private schools received more vouchers than their self-reported student enrollment.

*Voucher Programs Exacerbate Inequality.*

Vouchers often fail to cover the full cost of private school tuition, or the additional costs associated with attending private school, such as transportation and meals. This leaves families to make up the difference. While more affluent families can cover this gap, lower-income families cannot do so easily. In Ohio, for instance, the largest voucher program in the state offered up to [$6,036](https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/nonpublic-data-scholarship-payments) per student in 2022-23. However, the average private school tuition in the state is [$7,815,](https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-private-school#wisconsin) leaving families to pay at least $1,779. Another concern is the pattern of private schools raising tuition costs -- in [some cases by as much as 25%](https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai24-949.pdf) -- in response to the availability of vouchers, which further prices out lower-income families. Where states have recently expanded voucher programs to all families regardless of income, affluent families who can already afford private school are [overwhelmingly benefiting](https://staging.arktimes.com/arkansas-blog/2023/10/11/arkansas-learns-report-95-of-voucher-students-did-not-attend-public-school-last-year). Clearly, vouchers do not give all families a real educational choice. And as state leaders expand voucher programs while failing to more deeply invest in public schools, they further harm students and families who prefer public schools.

*Voucher Programs Promote Exclusionary Practices.*

Unlike public schools, which must accept all students, many private schools have selective admissions policies. Private schools have been found to exclude students based on [academic performance](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/01623737231183397?casa_token=olQSKgofNE8AAAAA%3AgEf3F72iw4G4Fd7LqCz1esfZS4SA5y2XR3obknO1mWvuDYs-atlJIQl6F8LMSuT4woKUVSVq_u5J2Us&journalCode=epaa), [religion](https://tcf.org/content/commentary/second-class-students-vouchers-exclude/?session=1&agreed=1), [sexuality](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/discrimination-lgbt-private-religious-schools_n_5a32a45de4b00dbbcb5ba0be), gender identity, multilingual status, [disability status](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/large-network-private-schools-pays-215000-settle-lawsuit-alleging-discrimination-against), and behavioral history. Students with specialized needs in particular are often turned away from private schools entirely or forced to pay for any additional costs associated with their education. In Washington D.C., the [main reason](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf) students didn’t use the voucher program was because they couldn’t find a private school that would provide the accommodations their disability required. This cherry-picking undermines the principle of providing all children with access to a quality education and often leaves public schools with fewer resources to educate the students with the highest needs.

*Voucher Programs Harm Community Cohesion*

Voucher programs lead to the fragmentation of communities by pulling students out of local public schools and dispersing them across various private ones. Studies have shown that voucher programs [increase segregation](https://tcf.org/content/report/private-school-vouchers-pose-threat-integration/). This is logical, as school voucher programs were created in the [1950s](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/09/27/school-choice-developed-way-protect-segregation-abolish-public-schools/) as a way for white parents to resist school integration efforts. Today, public schools serve as community hubs where children from diverse backgrounds come together, promoting social cohesion and understanding. Voucher programs exacerbate socioeconomic divides by further enabling affluent families, who are often white, to leave public schools -- thereby deepening social and economic divisions within communities. By encouraging the separation of students into various private institutions, vouchers fragment communities and reduce the social benefits of a shared educational experience.

*Conclusion*

While I acknowledge that families want more educational choices, school voucher programs do not create real choice for families. There are certainly many issues with our public education system that prevent it from effectively serving students, but funneling money out of this system and into private institutions through vouchers is not the solution to our problems. A strong public education system is integral to our democracy, and vouchers undermine public education. Additionally, these programs lack proper accountability, exacerbate inequality, engage in exclusionary practices, fragment communities, exacerbate segregation, and decrease academic achievement. Instead of diverting funds to private institutions, lawmakers should focus on strengthening our public schools to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has access to a high-quality education.

I urge you to reject [Bill number] and instead prioritize policies that support and enhance our public education system. [Name of Organization] is available to speak further on this issue, provide additional resources, or answer any questions you may have. For further information, please contact [Insert Contact Information]. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.