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TESTIMONY: H.3591
BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

February 9, 2023

The League of Women Voters of South Carolina has consistently opposed any mechanism that diverts public money to private schools. Taxpayer-funded scholarships, such as those described in Senate Bill 39 and tax-credit plans, such as those described in Senate Bill 285, are alike in that their ultimate effect is to divert money that could be spent for public schools to pay expenses related to religious or other private schools. The intent of both tactics appears to conflict with Section 4, Article XI of South Carolina's Constitution of 1895.

Historically, Americans have valued free public education as a public good. The scholarship funds attributable to either proposal in the two current bills would not be accessible to all students in South Carolina. Under either plan, religious or other private schools could discriminate against students on the basis of religion, gender, disability, or academic aptitude.

Academic achievement for private school students does tend to be higher than results for public school students; however, it would be a mistake to conclude that private schools provide superior instruction. Educators who are familiar with research findings know that academic achievement is positively correlated with family income, a relationship that has been demonstrated consistently over many years in study after study. A recent example is the longitudinal study by Pianta and Ansari (2018), which revealed that merely controlling for variation in family income eliminated most of the differences in achievement for public versus private school students.

If the General Assembly is inclined to enact mechanisms to divert potential tax dollars to religious or other private schools, then the League of Women Voters agrees that the question should be put to the voters. Our hope, indeed our expectation, is that the voters will agree that free public education is a public good and that funds intended for the public coffers should not be diverted to religious schools or to other private schools.

Pianta, R.C., & Ansari, A. (2018) Does Attendance in Private Schools Predict Student Outcomes at Age 15? Evidence from a Longitudinal Study. *Educational Researcher*, 47(7).
<https://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/xfYmtC25VddcCfbA3xiV/full>

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