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TESTIMONY: S.39

BEFORE THE FULL HOUSE EDUCATION AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

April 4, 2023

I am Dr. Janelle Rivers, representing the League of Women Voters of South Carolina. I am a retired educator and administrator with four grandchildren who attend South Carolina public schools.

We oppose Senate bill 39 because it aligns with current national efforts to privatize public education (Cunningham, 2021). The League has consistently opposed any mechanism that diverts public money to private schools. Historically, Americans value free public education as a public good. The long-term strength of South Carolina's economy depends upon the quality of its workforce, and creating a well-prepared workforce requires a strong system of public schools.

My own children attended both public and private schools. Like many other families, we learned that private school instruction is not superior to public school instruction. Private school teachers are often uncertified; course offerings tend to be restricted; and extra-curricular programs are significantly more limited.

Why, then are the academic results of private schools consistently better than results for public schools over all grades and subject areas where comparisons can be made? The answer is that private schools filter their students' peer group. Students in private schools come from families who are willing to devote their time and financial resources to making sure that their children do well academically.

In study after study over many years, researchers have consistently found strong positive correlations between academic achievement and family income. One 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.

S. 39 diverts tax money away from public schools, and the opportunities it creates will not be accessible to all students. Under this plan, religious or other private schools could discriminate against students based on religion, gender, disability, or academic aptitude. Furthermore, the accountability measures in this bill are far more lenient than what is required of public schools.

Many school districts already allow families to choose among schools within their boundaries or accept students from neighboring districts. The League supports the principle of offering a wide range of vocational and traditional academic options within a strong well-funded public school system. We oppose using tax money to privatize education. Consequently, we urge you to vote against this bill.

Cunningham, M.T. (2021). Conclusion: Defeating Dark Money in School Privatization—And Everywhere Else. In: *Dark Money and the Politics of School Privatization*, pp 231-243. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73264-6_10,

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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