



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA
PO Box 8453, Columbia, SC, 29202, (803) 251-2726, www.lwvsc.org

POSITION PAPER ON EDUCATION VOUCHERS AND TUITION TAX CREDITS

DEFINITIONS

Experimental voucher programs, designed to use public funds to pay for all or part of the costs of students' tuition at private or religious schools, have been implemented largely in urban sites, including Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York City and Washington, DC. Efforts in South Carolina, funded by out-of-state school privatization groups, would legislate private school voucher and tuition tax credit programs for statewide implementation.

- An *education or school voucher* is a certificate by which parents are given the ability to pay for the education of their children at a school of their choice, rather than the public school to which they were assigned.
- A *tuition tax credit* is a designated amount of money taxpayers may take as a credit on their state or federal income taxes for expenses associated with sending their children to private or religious schools.

Proponents of education vouchers and tuition tax credits hypothesize that market-based education reform will compel traditional public schools to become more effective, restore parental control of education, improve public student achievement, and expand educational opportunities for children of families in poverty. Empirical research has failed to yield solid and credible evidence that supports the claims of school choice advocates.ⁱ

SOUTH CAROLINA BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Unsuccessful legislation was introduced in the 2003-2004 S.C. General Assembly session. Bills in subsequent sessions have kept the basic premise and language, though they contained changes regarding scope, funding and allocation formula. LWVSC and our education advocacy partners have been successful in stopping these bills, despite a large infusion of campaign contributions that are made to

South Carolina elected officials by out-of-state school privatization supporters, such as New York real estate developer Howard Rich.

In 2009 LWVSC opposed the **Educational Opportunity Act** (S520) that would allow for tuition tax credits of up to \$4,000 for students to attend private schools. The bill was referred to committee and is not expected to advance in 2010.

Legislation has been introduced to provide for choice within the public schools. **Public School Choice Program Act** (S607) would create a statewide school choice program that has voluntary enrollment and provide funding by the General Assembly to offset the cost of transportation. In 2009, S607 received a favorable committee report and was carried over to the 2010 session. We are attentive to the possibility that supporters of choice outside the public schools will try to attach tax credits and/or vouchers to such bills.

WHY THE LWVSC OPPOSES SCHOOL VOUCHERS AND TUITION TAX CREDITS

The League of Women Voters opposes use of state funds for private school tuition. Opposition is linked to LWV support for equal access to education and support for desegregation as a means of promoting equal access. The LWV is uneasy about the negative impact that school vouchers/tuition tax credits would have on the public schools by encouraging flight, particularly from desegregated schools. The LWVSC is concerned about recent legislation in the S.C. General Assembly for the following reasons:

1. The legislation did not provide equal access to a quality education for all children in our largely rural state. Proposed voucher plans would not expand educational opportunities for poor children whose families find the expenses of private schooling, including tuition and transportation, out of reach. In

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