

Dear Governor Pritzker (cc Illinois General Assembly):

We urge you to make a formal commitment that Illinois will not participate in the new federal school voucher program to begin in 2027.

The voucher program was created as part of Congress' passage of HR 1 (the "One Big Beautiful Bill"), and, as with the rest of that legislation, it will do grave harm to the public good, in particular Illinois' public schools, which serve nine out of ten of the children in our state.

Our public schools remain underfunded despite the General Assembly's commitment to achieve full funding by 2027. Now in FY 2026, we remain more than \$5.7 billion away from the goal of full funding, and \$3 billion from 90% funding adequacy.

Moreover, full funding assumes federal funding remains constant, but the proposed FY 2026 federal budget would cut an additional \$300 million in funding from Illinois' public schools.

Voucher programs divert public dollars to fund private schools. The majority of existing voucher programs around the country serve families who would send their children to private schools regardless of whether they received vouchers or not.

Illinois has previously experimented with a harmful private school voucher program, the now defunct Invest in Kids program. Over six years it diverted more than \$315 million dollars from our General Revenue Fund to private schools, 95% of which were religious.

The majority of private schools taking voucher funds in Illinois had policies which discriminated against at least one protected class of students, including students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, immigrants, English-language learners, pregnant, parenting and married students. Many schools also discriminated on the basis of religion.

Strikingly, more than half of schools participating in the program did not provide vouchers to Black students; more than a third did not provide vouchers to Latinx students.

In addition, only about 15% of schools receiving voucher funds reported serving *any* special education students, whereas *all* public schools in Illinois serve students with disabilities who have individualized education programs.

The federal voucher program is designed as a tax credit scholarship program, like Invest in Kids. It will benefit taxpayers who can divert their federal income tax obligation via a contribution to a third-party voucher-distributing organization.

The federal law will allow these organizations to also fund out-of-pocket expenses of public school families, like tutoring or after-school programs. However, this limited benefit to public school students will not offset the dollars diverted from the public school system as a whole, nor the broader negative impact of using public dollars for private schools.

Public schools, obligated to serve all children, are the foundation of a healthy democracy. At the federal level, the current presidential administration is attempting to weaken—with a goal of ultimately dismantling it altogether—a publicly-funded public school system that serves all children, and carrying this goal by ending federal funding, oversight and support of public schools.

Your duty under our State's constitution is to ensure that our State finances a system of public schools that are free, high-quality and non-sectarian. Do not repeat the mistake made by the General Assembly and Governor in 2017. Do not allow the establishment of a voucher program of any form in Illinois.

Signed,