

Cook County Board of Commissioners
118 N. Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60602

April 15, 2026

Dear Cook County Board President and Commissioners:

We urge you to vote NO on Resolution 26-974. The new federal school voucher scheme will divert critical resources away from Cook County's already underfunded public schools. Illinois has the authority to opt out of this federal voucher scheme, and it is important that local elected officials make clear their opposition to Illinois participating in this harmful scheme.

Across Cook County, public schools are a crucial institution at the heart of every community, educating the vast majority of children and young people. It is in the interest of all the residents of Cook County that our public schools are equitably and adequately funded, open to all students, and accountable to the public.

While some of the school districts in Illinois with the highest property wealth are located in Cook Co, we also have some with the least in the state. This has led to dramatic inequality in what schools are able to provide their students. At the same time, many communities with little property wealth are then burdening their residents with the highest rate of property taxes. The total shortfall for underfunded Cook County school districts this year is \$2,523,244,631.49 according to the state's own formula—and vouchers would deepen that gap.

Voucher schemes funnel tax dollars to private schools that discriminate and exclude. Most families that take advantage of voucher schemes would send their children to private school regardless of the availability of vouchers; that will be especially true of the new federal scheme where a family of four making \$359,000 in Cook County will still be eligible for a voucher.

When public dollars are spent on private schools, there is little accountability, transparency and oversight on how they are used. Unlike in public schools, when tax dollars go to private schools as vouchers, there are no school boards, subject to the Freedom of Information Act, the Open Meetings Act, nor the ballot box, who are determining how funds are spent.

Decades of voucher schemes at the state level have now shown that there are not improved academic outcomes for the students who receive vouchers, and in many states, these schemes have resulted in drastically *worse* outcomes, especially for low-income students and students with disabilities.

Supporters of the federal voucher scheme claim it will benefit public schools because some dollars may be directed to public school students. On balance, those funds will also be spent without the oversight that public spending should have, and, as in all voucher schemes, will disproportionately benefit wealthy families who are not in need of additional resources.

The Cook County Board should instead advocate for our State government 1) to fulfill its obligations under Article X of the Illinois Constitution, as the level of government with the primary responsibility of financing "an efficient system of high quality public educational institutions and services" and 2) to make good on the General Assembly's promise to fully fund the Evidence-Based Formula by 2027.

That will require progressive revenue sources, where the wealthiest Illinoisans, individuals and corporations, including those in Cook County, must pay their fair share, and the Board should also advocate for the tax reforms to ensure this takes place.

Signed,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Chicago National Organization for Women
Chicago Teachers Union
Citizen Action/Illinois
Cook County College Teachers Union
Equip for Equality
Every Block a Village
50th Ward United Working Families
44th Ward Action
Illinois Education Association
Illinois Families for Public Schools
Illinois Federation of Teachers
Illinois National Organization for Women
Indivisible Chicago Alliance
Indivisible Chicago Northwest Side
Indivisible Greater West Loop
Indivisible Lincoln Square
Institute for the Public Good
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
League of Women Voters of Illinois
Learning Disabilities Association of Illinois
Lugenia Burns Hope Center
National Council of Jewish Women - Chicago North Shore
National Council of Jewish Women - South Cook Section
Network 49
Northside Action for Justice
NT Local
Our Schools Chicago
Palatine Supports Public Schools
Palenque LSNA
Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education
Southeast Environmental Task Force
Southwest Suburban Federation of Teachers
Sunrise Chicago
The People's 32nd
39th Ward Neighbors United
33rd Ward Working Families
Trans Up Front Illinois
290IPO
United Working Families
West Suburban Teachers Union
Workers United