

Testimony of
Ray Rossomando
Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

Re:

**HB 5424 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX CREDIT FOR EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY
SCHOLARSHIP DONATIONS**

February 22, 2023

Representative Horn, Senator Fonfara, and members of this esteemed committee, my name is Ray Rossomando and I am the Director of Policy, Research, and Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

CEA strongly opposes HB 5424 and the funding of private schools through tax credits. The proposal in HB 5424 is a private school voucher program masquerading as a tax credit.

Here is how the tax credit – voucher – works:

A parent wants to send their child to a private or parochial school. Rather than paying the school, the parent donates to a third party who pays the school.

The parent then reduces their income tax liability by the amount of the credit.

In the end, the state pays for the cost of the private school tuition in foregone revenue, leaving fewer funds to pay for ECS, special education, or other appropriated programs. Depending on how much the tax credit is worth, all or part of the tuition would be indirectly paid by the state.

If the tax credit is worth 100% of tuition, then Connecticut taxpayers would pay, on average, \$50,436 per student to send a child to a private high school in the state. So every 20 Connecticut students who attend Choate Rosemary Hall, with a tuition of \$50,000 – about the state average for private school tuition – would cost the state about \$1 million. That would mean that if only half of the school's enrollment of about 865 is from Connecticut, over \$21 million of state funds would be used to subsidize Choate Rosemary Hall parents alone.¹

If the credit is worth less than 100%, then the parent would have to be wealthy enough to pay the difference. As an example, if the credit was capped at \$10,000, a parent who wants to send their daughter to Miss Porter's, with a tuition of about \$68,000, would have to pay \$58,000 per

¹ <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/choate-rosemary-hall-profile>

year.² A family that can spend \$58,000 per child on high school tuition likely does not need a handout from the state.

If the credit is worth 50% of tuition, then a parent who sends their children to the Frederick Gunn School, with a tuition of about \$70,000, would have to pay \$35,000 per year per child.³ The state would pay \$35,000 per child too.

Whether called a voucher, tax credit scholarship, education savings account, or a duck, programs like this are handouts to wealthy taxpayers that decimate public education. Here is what concepts like tax credit scholarships and vouchers do.

Promote segregation: This type of program was conceived of as a way to circumvent *Brown v. Board of Education* and subsidize the cost of White parents sending their children to private schools with controlled enrollment policies.

Starve public schools of funds: They drain resources from public schools by reducing the amount of revenue available to fund ECS, special education, and other key programs that support local schools.

Falsely promote choice: These programs subsidize wealthy families who can already afford private education. They do not help low-income families who do not have income to pay additional tuition costs out of pocket or who don't have tax liability sufficient to benefit from the credit.

Cause a decline in academic achievement: Numerous studies have shown that vouchers don't improve academic achievement and, in many cases, result in worse achievement. Studies of long-standing programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C. showed no improvement in reading and math. Studies of programs in Indiana, Louisiana, and Ohio showed diminishing performance.⁴

Subsidize wealthy families and corporations: Only those with significant tax liability (and therefore significant income) can benefit. Some programs are structured to provide the benefit to corporations or the third-party pass-through entity. In the end, it is the same shift of resources from those in need to the wealthy.

Reduce transparency and public oversight: Where programs like this have been put into place, little oversight has followed, resulting in fraud and profiteering. Additionally, public funds are redirected to schools without public oversight or elected school boards. In some cases, they

² <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/miss-porter-s-school-profile>

³ <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/the-frederick-gunn-school-profile>

⁴ See: R. Joseph Waddington & Mark Berends, *Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement Effects for Students in Upper Elementary & Middle School*, 37 *J. of Policy Analysis & Mgmt.* 4, 738-808 (Aug. 2018); Atilla Abdulkadiroğlu, Parag A. Pathak, & Christopher R. Walters, *Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement?*, 10 *Am. Econ. Journal: Applied Econ.* 1, 175-206 (Jan. 2018); David Figlio & Krzysztof Karbownik, *Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, & Performance Effects*, *Fordham Inst.* (July 2016); U.S. Dep't of Educ., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied* (June 2018); Megan Kuhfeld, et al., *The Pandemic Has Had Devastating Impacts on Learning. What Will It Take to Help Students Catch Up?*, *Brookings Inst.* (Mar. 3, 2022), as cited in NCPE *Opposing Private School Vouchers: A toolkit for Legislators and Advocates*, (Feb. 2023).

are redirected to sectarian schools resulting in the state subsidizing religious perspectives in violation of the separation of church and state.

In summary, CEA strongly opposes schemes to shift the cost of private K-12 schools to taxpayers via concepts like tax credit scholarships, education savings accounts, vouchers, or any other similar mechanism. We urge this committee's rejection of HB 5424 and thank you for your consideration.