

Testimony against HJR 1

February 22, 2013 for the Hearing on March 1, 2013

LaDawn Druce Vice-President and Secretary/Treasurer of NEA-Alaska and the president of the Kenai Peninsula Education Association. Also, the mother of three sons who all attended and graduated from public schools in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District.

As Alaskans we are fortunate to have school choice within our public schools. Parents have the ability to choose a program that meets their child's needs and many districts offer a variety of alternative options and many excellent public charter schools.

Before you today is a resolution that would allow the voters to change the constitution of the state which would allow public funds to go to private and/or religious schools. In addition to the argument of "choice" is the notion that vouchers create competition thereby improving public schools. There is no evidence to support this assertion.

The facts are that private schools can: limit enrollment, discriminate in their admissions, expel student without due process, hire teachers that are not certified, and refuse admissions to special needs students.

Alaska's parents may indeed be asking for greater choice in education, but it is choice within the public schools as evidenced in the findings of the Education Reform Summit hosted by Mayor Sullivan in Anchorage last year.

Do voucher systems lead to higher student achievement? The answer is no. Two examples come from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the state of Ohio. A recent study by the Public Policy Forum on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), which has been in existence for over 20 years, shows that the voucher students underperformed the public school students in both math and reading on standardized tests. Also, in 2011 Milwaukee Public Schools were required to levy \$50 million in taxes to subsidize vouchers. In Ohio, where the charter schools are not part of the public school system, Innovation Ohio recently released a study which also demonstrates that the investment does not equal results. The study found that in 2012, \$744 million was diverted from public education to charter schools. The majority of the schools that received public dollars on average scored significantly lower on Ohio's Performance Index Score than the public schools the students had left.

Rather than pass a resolution that would encourage a voucher program, let Alaska be the leader in funding innovative programs that improve student learning in our public schools. Let's fund technology that connects even our most remote districts with the Lower 48 and the world; let's fund Advanced Placement courses, and Career Technical classes that prepare our students for the best universities and skilled well-paying jobs; let's fund preschool for all children in the state.

NEA-Alaska is committed to a great public education for every child, and we are working diligently to be the leaders in our profession, ensuring a quality and qualified teacher in every classroom.

Alaska does not need to change the constitution. We need to work together to improve our public schools, educate our children and strengthen our communities.

Please vote DO NOT PASS on HJR 1.

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