



September 24, 2021

The Honorable Kerry Benninghoff
Majority Leader
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Room 110 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2171

The Honorable Curt Sonney
Chair
House Education Committee
Room 214 Ryan Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2004

Dear Representatives Benninghoff and Sonney:

We write to make it clear that we oppose House Bill 1254 in the strongest possible terms. This misguided legislation would force school districts to create tuition voucher programs if they close a school building - even for a day.

The bill would, quite literally, cost school districts millions of dollars just because they follow medical and scientific health guidance to protect students, school staff, and their families from COVID-19.

We share the goal of keeping Pennsylvania's schools open for in-person instruction. However, it is inevitable that some schools will need to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines when facing a severe COVID-19 outbreak. Under House Bill 1254, even temporary closures of a single classroom, authorized in order to protect students' and school staff members' health and safety, would require the creation of tuition voucher programs.

This is unacceptable.

Just as troubling, an amendment likely to be offered to this bill, Amendment 02321, appears to apply these tuition voucher provisions "to COVID-19 outbreaks or a COVID-19 related mandate or policy."

This amendment, if adopted, would likely apply to every school district in the commonwealth, draining precious state funds from schools that are doing everything possible to educate Pennsylvania's students during a global pandemic.

Forcing school officials to choose between keeping their students and staff members safe from a virus that has cost nearly 700,000 Americans their lives or losing millions in state funding to tuition voucher programs is terrible public health policy. It also undercuts our mission to safely educate Pennsylvania's 1.7 million public school students.

We understand that the House plans to consider this bill as early as Monday, Sept. 27. We urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to reconsider this decision.

House Bill 1254 is a threat to the health and safety of our students, staff, and families. It cannot be allowed to advance in the General Assembly.

Please oppose this legislation or any other proposal like it.

Sincerely,

AFT – Pennsylvania
Allies for Children
The Arc of Pennsylvania
Children First (formerly Public Citizens for Children and Youth)
Delaware Valley Americans United for the Separation of Church and State
Disability Rights Pennsylvania
Education Law Center
Education Policy and Leadership Center
Education Voters of Pennsylvania
Keystone Research Center
Leaders for Educational Accountability and Reform Network (LEARN)
Pennsylvania AFL-CIO
Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA)
Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU)
Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS)
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA)
Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO)
Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center (PBPC)
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC)
Pennsylvania Principals Association
Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA)
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers
Public Interest Law Center
SEIU–32BJ
We the People