



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 939 Education – Student Education Grant Program - Established

POSITION: Oppose

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) opposes public funding for vouchers or state aid for private and parochial schools. This bill, HB 939, Student Education Grant Program – Established is a blatant attempt to expand the provision of state aid for nonpublic education. The state’s primary responsibility is to support public school students, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language, and physical and academic ability. **The LWVMD strongly opposes HB 939**, which would increase state aid to nonpublic schools.

This bill would create a new program to provide funding for nonpublic schools by taking advantage of the health guidelines put in place to protect students, teachers, and staff from the impact of Covid-19. It would allow any student to apply for a grant if that student’s assigned public school was not offering “fully in-person learning for all classes” on the first day of school in 2021-2022. By definition, this would apply to all students in the state of Maryland, whether or not they were enrolled in a public school at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year.

In addition, the bill would mandate that any student receiving a grant for the 2021-2022 school year, would continue to receive that grant until they are 21 years old or graduate from high school. Funds to pay for the grant would come from the state share of the foundation program allocated to the school system, thus reducing state funds available for public education. It restricts the ability of the state to regulate the program.

This bill is clearly an attempt to expand state support for nonpublic schools. It would transfer public money from public schools to nonpublic schools by allowing students already enrolled in private or parochial schools to apply for a grant that could then be used until they graduate from high school or turn 21 years old.

This is the wrong time to be sending more money to private and parochial schools when public schools are struggling to cope with the impact of Covid-19 and students are suffering. Public schools have long been under and inequitably funded, as the Kirwan Commission documented in 2020.¹ We need to support all our public schools, not just a few nonpublic schools.

The League urges the committee to give an unfavorable report to HB 939.

¹ Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education (December 2020). *Blueprint for Maryland’s Future: Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://dls.maryland.gov/policy-areas/commission-on-innovation-and-excellence-in-education>