



TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 415 Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships For Nonpublic School Students

POSITION: Oppose

BY: Nancy Soreng – President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) opposes public funding for vouchers or other aid for private and parochial schools. This bill, HB 415 *Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships for Nonpublic School Students*, is another form of providing 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 415**, which would increase state aid to nonpublic schools.

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, staff shortages, and the need to provide extra services to help students catch up. After a delay, public schools are beginning to receive the increased funding allocated under the Blueprint, but they are by no means fully funded. While current revenue seems adequate for the Blueprint, we are likely to need more revenue in FY2027 and beyond. We need to support all our public schools, not just a few nonpublic schools.

HB 415 calls for a mandated annual appropriation of \$10,000,000 for scholarships for students attending nonpublic schools in FY2024, and increases this allocation to \$16,000,000 in FY2027. Funding for the BOOST program keeps creeping up. The FY2018 budget allocated \$5.5 million for the scholarship program. This allocation increased to \$8,850,000 in FY2019 and \$10,000,000 in FY2021 and FY2022. This needs to stop.

The League opposes the FY2023 funding for the BOOST program and urges the General Assembly to find a way to eliminate this program as soon as possible.

We urge the committee to give an unfavorable report to HB 415 for the mandated allocation for the BOOST program increasing to \$16,000,000 in FY2027.