

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House of Delegates  
Appropriations Committee  
For the Hearing on  
Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships for Nonpublic School Students (HB 791)**

**February 20, 2024**

**OPPOSE**

Free State PTA represents over 71,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

***House Bill 791 seeks to incorporate funding in the operating budget for scholarships via the BOOST program for nonpublic school students. Whether it be scholarships, vouchers, or tax credits, the Free State PTA opposes any bill that uses Maryland taxpayer dollars for private schools (often religious ones) because it undermines the value of the Maryland public school system.***

Free State PTA advocates for the improvement of public education for all children and to guarantee public funds are not diverted to any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system. Our association believes diverting taxpayer dollars to private schools has a detrimental effect on Maryland public schools, especially a loss in revenue. Public dollars must remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students and the future of our state.

House Bill 791 requires the Governor to appropriate in the annual budget at least \$10 million, to start, in the general fund toward the BOOST Program (Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today). Unlike public schools, oftentimes private schools are not transparent with their disciplinary policies, do not practice diversity, equity and inclusion in their hiring practices or educational objectives nor do they disclose agreements that are found in a student or parent handbook. In fact, there are current BOOST schools that have in writing that they are not required to adopt any rule, regulation, policy, or personal accommodation that conflicts with its religious or moral teachings. That sparks a concern for the Free State PTA regarding students of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, requests for "reasonable" accommodations for a student with a disability may only be met.

When it comes to providing taxpayer scholarships to institutions that aren't required to adhere to state educational standards, the decision to appropriate such educational resources should rest solely for public schools. Free State PTA believes that no one educational program is best for all children. Public school personnel and parents must address the different ways that children learn and how Maryland public schools can provide the best education for all children.

Free State PTA believes that parents should be involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of public schools. In addition, the Free State PTA believes public schools should adhere to the following principles:

- Schools must provide adequate, objective, and language-appropriate information to parents so they can make informed decisions
- Students must have access to free transportation to ensure equity
- Schools must offer a fair and open selection process
- Curriculum, personnel, and student performance standards must be non-discriminatory and assure equal educational opportunities

The listing of [BOOST institutions in Maryland](#) do not meet these standards and/or expectations.

Lastly, the parent organization of Free State PTA, National PTA, is a founding member of the [National Coalition for Public Education \(NCPE\)](#). You can review multiple studies and reports of the NCPE regarding voucher programs and how diverting public funds to private schools have not resulted in the positive outcomes and in fact, notes many negative outcomes as it relates to student achievement, services for students with disabilities, adherence to civil rights and wasteful as well as fraudulent expenditures. Instead of providing scholarships to students to attend private schools, taxpayer dollars may better be spent sending these youth to accredited camps during the summertime to enhance their educational experiences and broaden their opportunities.

Therefore, the Free State PTA urges the defeat of HB 791 because public funds must be used for public schools only.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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