



## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

### HB 791 Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships For Nonpublic School Students

**POSITION: Oppose**

**BY: Linda T. Kohn - President**

**Date: February 20, 2024**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) opposes public funding for vouchers or other aid for private and parochial schools. This bill, SB 552 *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 791**, which would increase state aid to nonpublic schools.

This is the wrong time to mandate 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. The state is also facing a structural deficit. We need to support all our public schools, not just a few nonpublic schools.

HB 791 calls for a mandated annual appropriation of \$10,000,000 for scholarships for students attending nonpublic schools in FY2026, and increases this allocation to \$16,000,000 in FY2029. 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.

We urge the committee to give an unfavorable report to HB 791 for the mandated allocation for the BOOST program increasing to \$16,000,000 in FY2029.