



No Chance at Choice: Vouchers Violate Texan Values

Testimony Against HB 3

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When the framers of the Texas Constitution created our biennial Legislature in 1876, they considered the need to protect Texans from the meddling of out-of-state power brokers. That forethought continues to serve Texas students today as external and internal forces, driven by private interests, push our state toward an expensive, unequal, and harmful voucher program. HB 3, as introduced by Chairman Buckley, appears to be a vendor bill that would transfer the tax dollars of hardworking Texans to wealthy private school parents and billionaire out-of-state corporations, just as the framers of the 1876 Texas Constitution warned against. The voucher program in HB 3 violates the spirit of nearly 150 years of Texas values by spending public dollars to satisfy the desires of out of state powerbrokers. HB3 also directs Texan's tax dollars to private school pockets. This legislation defies the values expressed in Article 7 of our state Constitution and the assigned duty of lawmakers "to establish and make suitable provision for... an efficient system of public free schools." Under HB 3, our free education system, to include the broad spectrum of resources it provides to families across the state, is threatened. In defiance of the Texas Constitution, HB3 would ensure Texans have no chance at choice.

HB 3 Will Further Reduce Funds Available to Schools

According to the Legislative Budget Board, inflation-adjusted classroom funding dropped to \$50.6 billion, or \$9,948 per student in 2025 compared to \$10,655 in 2019. Despite claims of historic levels of spending on education, public school districts across the state are facing deficit budgets. Now, instead of addressing the needs of Texas students, schools, and teachers, House Bill 3 proposes to enact a costly voucher program that by Every Texan's analysis would cost the state \$2.25 billion if a meager 5% of students left public education for a voucher. At the local level, for example, Rockport Fulton ISD, which worked diligently last year to avoid adopting a deficit budget for the 2024-2025 school year, would see a loss of per student funding totaling more than \$1.2 million if 5% of students left for a private school using a voucher. Humble ISD passed its 2024-2025 budget with a \$14.9 million deficit, and it stands to lose nearly \$20 million with the same level of voucher take-up. Texas school districts are already facing difficult choices because the Legislature chose to keep the Basic Allotment stagnant since 2019 and has yet to address the needs of Special Education students. Introducing vouchers as a third, unequal system of education without addressing the dire funding needs of Texas public schools is an expensive abdication of a solemn Constitutional duty. Texans made a choice and voted for representatives who will invest in their state and community by supporting public education- the mobility it should ensure for all, and the resource systems it generates in communities across the state- and HB 3 takes that choice away.

Vouchers are Unequal, Ineffective and Wasteful



The costly development of a voucher program would reduce funding for already cash-strapped districts, while exacerbating inequity, inefficiency, and waste. . Every Texan testified previously that vouchers were first proposed as a recommendation of Governor Allan Shivers’s Subcommittee on Segregation in Public Schools, an effort to find “legal and legislative” rather than violent methods of resistance to desegregation after the ruling in *Brown v. Board* (1954). 70 years later, the voucher program in HB 3 threatens the use of public dollars to fund segregated schools. In other voucher states such as North Carolina, recent reporting shows that private schools, considered “segregation academies” in the 1960s and 70s, are receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in state voucher funding while maintaining a student body that is 99% white in a county that is only 40% white.

HB 3 would recreate North Carolina style segregation academies in Texas and would fail to efficiently provide a suitable education to meet the needs of 5.5 million public school students. In states that enacted vouchers to the scale Texas is proposing, most students using the vouchers were already in private school. Ohio saw little change in private school enrollment because most of the 60,000 new recipients since expansion to a universal voucher were already in private school. The same can be said for the voucher programs in Arkansas and Arizona.

As written, HB3 attempts to control some of the glaring problems witnessed in other states, but unequal segregation academies are ineffective solutions to Texas’ workforce needs. At its core, the current voucher legislation is a wasteful diversion of critical state funding that’s needed in classrooms across the state. Even with a \$1 billion appropriation, HB 3 will not meet the needs of public school students or their families. Instead, lawmakers should expect massive waste from the Certified Education Assistance Organizations (CEAOs) who will earn 5% of programs funds for serving as the middleman for voucher transactions, as we’ve witnessed in Florida and Arizona. In this age of grift, what would keep CEAOs from approving illegitimate expenses under the program besides this legislature’s constitutional duty to fund public schools, not vouchers?

Public Education Is the Tie That Binds

They knew in 1876 what was known in 1776 – a “general diffusion of knowledge” is “essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people.” In other words, public education is the tie that binds us together as Texans and Americans. Through dedicated struggle, our public schools support a more diverse state by instilling a unified vision of who we are as a community into each new generation of Texans. The promise of public education is the promise of American freedom. Vouchers, as proposed by HB 3, threaten that promise to our future and defy the democratic society our founders envisioned. Education Savings Accounts, or vouchers by any other name, would leave most Texans with no choice. Trusted community schools would be further stifled with funding cuts, and private schools would have the right to openly discriminate by selecting their most desirable students (or athletes), just as they did half a century ago. Ultimately, the most vulnerable students and those who need the most support to fulfill their potential as Texans and Americans would have no chance at choice.

