

American Civil Liberties Union NJ Education Law Center Paterson Education Fund

NJ State Conference of the NAACP Statewide Education Organizing Collaborative

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MR. CHRISTIE GOES TO WASHINGTON PUSHING EVEN MORE CUTS TO NJ PUBLIC SCHOOLS

GOVERNOR WANTS TO DIVERT PUBLIC FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Newark, NJ -- May 3, 2010

Today, Governor Christopher Christie will give the keynote address at a Washington, D.C. summit of groups promoting private school vouchers. The Governor will use the occasion to tout a bill introduced in the Legislature that brings vouchers to New Jersey by diverting public money to support private and religious schools, financed through a corporate tax break.

Bottom line: if enacted, the voucher bill will drain \$360 million in tax dollars from the State Treasury, money that is desperately needed to fund NJ public schools. The bill is sponsored by Senators Raymond Lesniak, Thomas Kean Jr. and Joseph Kyrillos.

While preaching to the pro-voucher choir, the Governor is proposing a massive \$1 billion cut in state aid to NJ public schools. Across the state, districts are struggling to cope with the Governor's aid cut and the aftermath of his call to defeat school budgets. The situation is so dire that students last week protested against the dismantling of their programs and teacher layoffs.

"It's hard to imagine how the Governor could support sending hundreds of millions in public funds to private and religious schools at a time like this," said Carla Larsen, President of the Statewide Education Organizing Committee. "The Governor's aid cut is already causing severe damage to public education. Why cause even more?"

Groups opposed to vouchers are sending a clear message to New Jersey politicians.

"This is not about 'school choice,'" said James Harris, President of the New Jersey NAACP. "This is about using precious public funds to subsidize private and religious education. Even worse, the private and religious schools will get public funding with no obligation to meet the academic standards that apply to public schools."

"Siphoning off public dollars to unaccountable private and religious schools is simply unconscionable," added Mr. Harris. "This will hurt, not help, improve public education, especially our schools serving low income students and students of color."

"It's clear why the Governor is in Washington talking up vouchers," said Lauren Hill, who oversees the Education Law Center's Camden Project. "He won't find a supportive audience here in NJ."

Hill noted that education and civil rights advocates and organizers have long opposed vouchers. Many testified against the first version of the Lesniak/Kean/Kyrillos bill before the Senate Economic Growth Committee in 2009. The new bill is even more problematic than the original, with many more districts targeted. (Read ELC's [analysis](#) of the bill.)

"We're ready to fight this latest bill, too," Larsen said. "The Governor can give speeches from

Washington to Los Angeles. It doesn't change the fact that taxpayers, parents and educators back home in New Jersey don't support vouchers. We support investing in the 1.3 million children in our public schools."

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