



**NEW JERSEY STATE CONFERENCE OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
OF COLORED PEOPLE**

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PRESS RELEASE

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NJ State NAACP Opposes Voucher Legislation S-1872—"Opportunity Scholarship Act"

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The New Jersey State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (New Jersey State NAACP) adamantly reasserts its organizational opposition to the creation of voucher schools that are supported by public dollars, such as those described in current Senate Bill S-1872. Titled the "Opportunity Scholarship Act", this legislation was introduced by State Senators Ray Lesniak (D-20th district) and Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21st district). The New Jersey State NAACP urges all legislators to thoroughly educate the tax-paying citizenry before this legislation advances any further.

For many years, the NAACP has opposed publicly funded voucher school programs with its last national resolution reaffirming this opposition adopted in 2003 at its national convention in Miami, Florida. New Jersey's latest attempt toward voucher schools proposes the establishment of a five-year pilot program giving tax credits to private corporations that fund "scholarships," or vouchers for low-income students in what are described as "chronically failing public schools" throughout the state. The New Jersey State NAACP believes that informed citizens will reject a bill that will give \$360 million in public funds to private and religious schools, which operate without strict accountability for the use of these funds, at a time when Governor Christie has proposed a massive \$1 billion dollar aid cut to the state's public schools. Governor Christie supports the current controversial voucher bill. In reality, this legislation proposes "opportunities" for selected students while abandoning too many other students. New Jersey State NAACP President, James E. Harris stated, "The New Jersey NAACP is disappointed that all of Senator Lesniak's voucher bills would take money away from all of the public schools and all of his student constituents in Elizabeth to create an elite opportunity for a select group of families to use tax dollars to send their children to private and parochial schools. The NAACP wants to use public money to improve public education for all New Jersey families."

The New Jersey State NAACP also opposed Senator Lesniak's Urban Schools Scholarship Act in 2006, and Urban Enterprise Zone Jobs Scholarship Act in 2008 because increasing numbers of students and amounts of money would be taken away from struggling public school budgets. The NAACP has correctly predicted that the voucher school movement wants to divert more and more funds away from the public schools, rather than solving the problems in public education for all students. New Jersey's newest voucher attempt would greatly expand the number of school districts targeted for vouchers, from 6 in a previous bill to 36, and the population of students who could apply for vouchers increases from 4,000 in a previous bill to 280,000, or over 20% of New Jersey's student population. Further, S-1872

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would fund private religious schools, disregarding the constitutional mandate for a separation of church and state. New Jersey State NAACP Education Chair, Adrienne D. Sanders, stated, "Although the voucher movement boasts the support of a few high profile Black Clergy, there are many other highly respected Black Clergy within the NAACP who support the organization's opposition to private and parochial voucher schools that are supported by public money." For the NAACP, public funding of private schools that serve selected students at the expense of public schools that serve all students is contrary to and inconsistent with the equal educational opportunities that the organization will always champion as vigorously as it did to triumph in the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

The New Jersey State NAACP will continue to educate the public that voucher schools are not to be confused with charter schools. In New Jersey, a charter school is a public school that operates independently of a local board of education under a charter granted and closely monitored by the Commissioner of Education. Conversely, the tuition for voucher schools will be paid with tax credits given to corporations, or money that will not be available to relieve the tax burden that New Jersey families face, so vouchers are funded with public, not private money. For increasing reasons, the New Jersey State NAACP asks all those concerned with ensuring equal educational opportunities for all public school students, as well as taxpayers concerned with accountability for the use of public funds, to join us in opposing vouchers in their current guise, S- 1872, the "Opportunity Scholarship Act."

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Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in education and in the public and private sectors. The NAACP is organized into State Conferences and Regions, and the New Jersey State Conference has 41 units or branches throughout the state. For more information about the New Jersey State NAACP, please visit us on the web at www.njnaacp.org.