

EDUCATION NEWS

Despite DOJ Claims, Jindal Says Voucher Suit No Closer to Resolution

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In response to a letter by House Speaker John Boehner, the US Justice Department announced that Louisiana has agreed to turn over information about the impact of the state's voucher program on Louisiana's desegregation efforts. The response noted that by providing the information, Louisiana brought the federal lawsuit challenging the validity of the state's program closer to resolution.

However, according to the Louisiana's governor Bobby Jindal, this is far from the case, and despite the cheery tone of the DOJ letter, the central issues in the lawsuit defy out-of-court resolution. Specifically, as long as the DOJ won't step back from its demand that the federal judge oversee the scholarships in districts where a federal desegregation order is in place, no agreement between the state and the federal authorities is possible.

"The Obama Administration's latest maneuver is nothing more than a PR stunt," Jindal said in a statement.

"While attempting to rebrand its legal challenge as merely an attempt to seek information about implementation of the scholarship program, the administration's real motive still stands — forcing parents to go to federal court to seek approval for where they want to send their children to school."

"The Obama Administration's letter is disingenuous," the statement continued. "The administration claims the state is suddenly providing information, when in reality, the information the federal government is seeking does not even exist yet. And they know it."

According to Caitlin Emma of Politico, the federal government claims that it was chiefly after information on the impact of the voucher program, and it was only stonewalling by the Jindal administration that forced it to resort to the courts. Jason Bedrick of the Cato Institute is not convinced. Even though in the letter to Congress the DOJ expressed support for voucher programs in general, can it really claim to be a supporter when it demands to be the final arbiter of when children can take advantage of such programs?

Unfortunately, the DOJ is being disingenuous. While their lawsuit would not have revoked vouchers that the state had already distributed, it would have blocked all future vouchers to students in districts under desegregation orders without federal permission. In other words, rather than leaving the choice of school in the hands of parents, parents would have to beg the federal government to allow their children to escape from failing government schools. This is problematic since the DOJ's absurd definition of segregation would prevent black students from leaving a school that the DOJ deems "insufficiently black" because there are a greater percentage of black students than black people living in the district.

Claiming to support school choice in general, and vouchers in particular, while reserving powers to determine a student's academic future that are best left to the parents is an impossibility, Bedrick argues. Thus, any reassurances offered by the government regarding the future of voucher programs in Louisiana and elsewhere at the same time that they are suing to halt those programs should be taken with a grain of salt.