



## Supporters of school voucher legislation in Pa. show their disappointment

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June 30th, 2011 2:12 pm by Mikhail Zinshteyn

After an 11th hour deal to patch together competing versions of a school voucher program failed to materialize Wednesday in the Pennsylvania Legislature, supporters of the bills expressed their disappointment.

Orthodox Union, the nation's largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization, released a statement:

It's a sad day for children and families across the Commonwealth. Those seeking greater educational opportunity and those families struggling to shoulder the financial burden of education are left waiting. While fully funding EITC at its current maximum is a positive sign after years of cuts, the compromise being negotiated would have helped thousands more. We hope for the sake of Pennsylvania's children, the Legislature can revisit this as soon as possible and agree to help even more families in need.

At libertarian think tank Cato Institute, Adam Schaeffer lamented the collapse in bicameral negotiations because it postponed a vote on the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC). As TAI has explained Schaeffer's position before, EITC to him is a better program since it rewards donors with tax credits for subsidizing student private school tuition without placing regulatory constraints on the participating schools. The bills that would have established a voucher program — SB1, HB 1708, HB 1678, and HB 1679 — would have imposed new bureaucratic burdens on private schools receiving public dollars to enroll students, says Schaeffer.

As a political prescription, Schaeffer offers this:

The EITC should not be legislatively handcuffed to vouchers. Vouchers are an inferior policy and a proven political liability. For once the popular, politically smart, most principled, and most effective thing to do are all the same; drop the voucher drama and expand the education tax credit program.

In a follow up email to an interview with TAI, the author of HB 1678, and HB 1679, Rep. Curt Schroder wrote:

There is no consensus on which bill or version of school choice to pass. That consensus cannot occur during the last week of session while we are passing budgets and related bills.

Furthermore, the House cannot be blamed for the failure of SB 1 to be reported from the Senate. If the groups driving this issue are finally willing to listen to reasonable proposals from House members, we might be able to make progress. It is my hope that over the summer the differences can be resolved and all choice supporters can unite behind a proposal we can pass.

Students First, a PAC that has financed numerous school voucher movements across the country, is still reserving hope an agreement can be struck, posting an urgent memo on its website encouraging supporters to press legislators for a final resolution.

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