

December 19th, 2017

New Hampshire House of Representatives  
Legislative Office Building  
33 North Main Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Honorable Members of the New Hampshire House of Representatives,

I am writing today to urge you to vote against SB 193. Under this bill the parent of an eligible child would contract to receive a grant from the Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF) to pay for educational expenses. CSF will receive 5% in administrative funds to manage the program, which includes providing each of its two top executives compensation in excess of \$290,000 (1). Public funds will be diverted from already underfunded public schools, and families could then use those public funds to pay educational expenses at any private school, including a private religious school. Families who home educate their children would also be eligible to receive these funds. In short, this is the equivalent of a voucher program.

While the recently revised version of this bill promises to reimburse districts for some of the funds they will lose, the source of this funding is unknown. The state of New Hampshire continues to under-fund its public school financial obligations - primarily the lack of building aid, cuts in stabilization grants, and reduced catastrophic special education aid. The promise of the reimbursement of a fraction of the actual funds lost is simply a smokescreen. This bill seeks to continue this trend of under-funding New Hampshire's public schools, which does nothing more than shift the burden to local taxpayers.

If SB 193 becomes law, we would have a system where state money is being used to fund private schools, including religious schools. Private schools and students who are home educated do not have the accountability or assessment requirements that New Hampshire's public schools are required to abide by. Even more concerning is the fact that private schools are not required to abide by federal special education rules and anti-discrimination provisions. I fail to see how SB 193 provides 'choice' and a 'level playing field' when in reality it will strip funding from public schools and allow the use of public dollars by private institutions who can pick and choose who they will (or will not) admit as students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that students with disabilities are provided with a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) that is tailored to their individual needs. IDEA was critical in shifting our educational model from one of exclusion (where students with disabilities were not participating with their differently abled peers in the regular education setting) to inclusion (where students with disabilities are a part of the regular education setting). The question of the legality of SB 193 under IDEA aside, SB 193 has the potential to set the progress IDEA sparked for students with disabilities back decades by setting up a system that, once again, makes it acceptable to have students with disabilities separate from their differently abled peers using public funds.

*What, exactly, about New Hampshire's public schools is broken that such a program is deemed necessary?*

Consider the following:

- The national average SAT score for 2016 was 1484 (down from 1490 in 2015).
  - In New Hampshire, the average score was 1568 (up from 1566 in 2015) (2).

- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for 2015 place New Hampshire in the top three nationally in the fourth and eighth grades in Reading and in Mathematics (3).
- We are recognized for our innovation when it comes to public education as demonstrated by the use of competencies or PACE models which allow for individual student growth, and for our implementation of ELOs (extended learning opportunities) for individualized real life learning.

I believe that this proposed legislation is a solution searching for a problem. It is substantially flawed and would diminish opportunities for the vast majority of public education students through reduced funding and eliminate the rights of voters to determine how public funds are to be spent. I urge you to vote against SB 193 and instead, support encouraging the state to re-direct money to increasing adequacy aid; maintaining stabilization grants at 100% funding; re-implementing the state building aid program; and fully funding catastrophic special education aid.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lisa A. Witte  
112 Old Street Road  
Peterborough, New Hampshire 03458  
207.671.2712  
lisawitteavery@gmail.com

*I am the parent of a school-aged child with disabilities who attends a public charter school. I am also a professional educator currently serving as the Superintendent of Schools in the Monadnock Regional School District. This testimony is submitted both personally and with the support of the Monadnock Regional School Board (4).*

- (1) <http://www.scholarshipfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CSF-FY16-IRS-Form-990.pdf>
- (2) [https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/sat/NH\\_16\\_03\\_03\\_01.pdf](https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/sat/NH_16_03_03_01.pdf)
- (3) <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons>
- (4) <https://goo.gl/xvBVnY>