

House Education  
 02/16/2023 01:30 PM  
 HB23-1079 Income Tax Credits For Nonpublic Education  
 Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Kelly Hegarty For herself	<p>Dear Education Committee Members,</p> <p>School choice is a hot issue in Colorado! I know many parents in our rural areas do not have the type of school they need for their child. Proximity and affordability are also a concern as well as the teaching materials and methods.</p> <p>Nationwide, over 2 million students left the public schools last year. Colorado C.M.A.S. performance scores show our students are lacking proficiency in the basic areas of reading, language arts and math. (<a href="https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/cmas-dataandresults-2022">https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/cmas-dataandresults-2022</a>).</p> <p>And not all children learn in the same manner. In some cases parents have the burden of excessive travel and affordability to obtain the type of learning environment for their child.</p> <p>Something needs to change. Whether it's learning style, learning environment, curriculum choices, proximity and affordability of school choices, or allowing more parent involvement, our schools need to find additional ways to meet the needs of our children.</p> <p>Please support HB23-1079 - Income Tax Credits For Nonpublic Education, in hearing today (Thursday February 16th). The bill establishes income tax credit for any taxpayer to claim a credit when the taxpayer enrolls a qualified child in a private school or the taxpayer provides a scholarship to a qualified child for enrollment in a private school. The tax credit may also apply to any taxpayer who uses home-based education.</p> <p>This bill is an opportunity to bring back learning and school options, flexibility, affordability, and the school choices that many Coloradans are seeking, and bring back the education that all our children deserve.</p> <p>Thank You!</p>



# AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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February 16, 2023

The Honorable Rep. Barbara McLachlan  
Chair, House Education Committee  
Colorado State Capitol  
200 East Colfax Avenue  
Denver, Colorado 80203-1784

**Re: OPPOSE HB 1079, Letter of Opposition from American Atheists in opposition to a bill that undermines public education to fund private schools**

Dear Chairperson McLachlan and Members of the House Education Committee:

As a Colorado resident and State Director for American Atheists, which has more than 1,300 constituents in Colorado, I write in opposition to HB 1079. Voucher programs and tax credit programs like the proposed “Educational Autonomy and Budget Reduction Act” increase educational inequality by taking needed resources from the public education system, a system that serves every child regardless of their beliefs, background, or necessary accommodations. We strongly urge you to reject this harmful bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. American Atheists opposes the use of public dollars to fund private religious education.

The tax-credit program proposed in HB 1079 most closely resembles voucher programs. These usually come at the expense of public school districts and communities statewide, regardless of whether a few students benefit.<sup>1</sup> When a public school loses a student to the voucher program, it loses thousands of dollars that help pay for teachers and classroom costs. These schools continue to have the same overhead with less revenue.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cofniff, Ruth. 2019. “Wisconsin's school voucher expansion costs district millions.” *Wisconsin Examiner*, October 18, 2019. Available at <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2019/10/18/wisconsins-school-voucher-expansion-costs-districts-millions/>.

<sup>2</sup> Strauss, Valerie. 2017. “A disturbing look at how charter schools are hurting a traditional school district.” *Washington Post*, January 9, 2017. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/01/09/a-disturbing-look-at-how-charter-schools-are-hurting-a-traditional-school-district/>; Turner, Corner. 2017. “The Promise and Peril of School Vouchers.” *NPR*, May

As students leave public schools, public schools lose valuable resources. This doesn't just send the quality of education plummeting — public schools are often the only institutions in poorer communities with the mandate, capacity and commitment to reliably serve communal functions. This includes ensuring children are reliably fed, as low-income families increasingly rely on school lunches for nutrition, and many public schools have kept their kitchens operating during lockdown to fulfill this need.

The marketing rhetoric espoused by private school profiteers often revolves around the idea that private schools teach kids better than public schools. However, studies from several states show that education outcomes for students using vouchers and scholarships are demonstrably worse than their public school counterparts.<sup>3</sup> Voucher programs without proper oversight and accountability for the use of the funds are ripe for fraud and abuse. In states where these programs have already been implemented without strict accountability measures, parents have used the money to buy expensive electronics, beauty supplies, other non-education related expenses, and even an abortion.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, funding religious private schools at the expense of public schools endangers the separation of religion and government, an essential component of religious freedom. One of the most fundamental principles of religious liberty is that the government should not compel any citizen to pay for another's religious indoctrination. However, voucher programs overwhelmingly benefit religious schools, some of which teach extremist dogma in lieu of fact. Many such schools also discriminate against students whose identities and beliefs are not endorsed by a particular church, and based on recent U.S. Supreme Court guidance, they lack labor protections for educators. This type of entanglement of religious organizations with government also endangers the religious freedom of those institutions, threatening their autonomy and opening them up to government audits, control, and interference.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to reject this unnecessary and harmful legislation and, instead, to sustain and support public education in Colorado. If you should have any questions

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12, 2017. Available at

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/05/12/520111511/the-promise-and-peril-of-school-vouchers>.

<sup>3</sup> O'Donnell, Patrick. 2016. "Tuition Vouchers Aren't Helping Ohio Kids Learn More, New Study Finds." *Cleveland.com*, July 11, 2016. [https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2016/07/tuition\\_vouchers\\_arent\\_helping.html](https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2016/07/tuition_vouchers_arent_helping.html);

Stein, Perry. 2018. "Students In Only Federally Funded Voucher Program Perform Worse in Math." *Washington Post*, May 30, 2018.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/study-students-in-only-federally-funded-voucher-program-perform-worse-on-math/2018/05/30/4b6f00c8-6415-11e8-a768-ed043e33f1dc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/study-students-in-only-federally-funded-voucher-program-perform-worse-on-math/2018/05/30/4b6f00c8-6415-11e8-a768-ed043e33f1dc_story.html); Winsor, Morgan. 2016.

"Louisiana's Controversial Voucher Program Harms Poor Students, Lowers Grades, New Study Finds."

*International Business Times*, Jan 10, 2016.

<https://www.ibtimes.com/louisianas-controversial-voucher-program-harms-poor-students-lowers-grades-new-study-2258417>.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Wingett-Sanchez, Y. and O'Dell, R. 2018. "Parents spent \$700K in school voucher money on beauty supplies, apparel; attempted cash withdrawals." *The Arizona Republic*, Oct. 29, 2018. Available at <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/arizona/2018/10/29/misspent-school-voucher-funds-exceed-700-k-little-recovered/1780495002/>.

regarding American Atheists' opposition to HB 1079, or similar private school tax credit and voucher bills, please contact Brittany Williams, American Atheists' State Policy Counsel, at [bwilliams@atheists.org](mailto:bwilliams@atheists.org).

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Greben  
Colorado Assistant State Director  
American Atheists

Mike Dorman  
25541 E Indore Dr  
Aurora, CO 80016

February 13, 2023

House Education Committee  
200 E Colfax Avenue  
Denver, CO 80203

Chair McLachlan and members of the Committee:

I am writing to you **in support of HB23-1079**.

As a father of five children who attend, or have attended, a variety of public, private, and homeschool environments, I am acutely aware of the great importance of empowering parents to select the educational plan best suited for their children. This bill does just that, providing support to parents for whom their local public school is not working for their student.

While maintaining a 66% funding advantage for public schools, which have unique requirements and challenges, HB23-1079 ensures that all students are getting the best possible education opportunities in our state. Many students feel lost or overlooked in the large urban and suburban public schools, making it difficult to thrive there (this was certainly the case with one of our children.) This bill provides more options for tailoring educational plans to students for which the public schools just aren't working. It also helps ease school overcrowding, which is such a challenge for so many school districts.

In situations where the local public school is not adequately meeting a student's needs, many parents feel stuck. The only options are to open enroll in another public school (often resulting in long commute times and increased fuel consumption), moving to a charter school (which typically have very long wait lists), enrolling in a private school at significant financial burden to the family, or transitioning to a homeschool program (which may be impossible for families with two working parents.) We should not be abandoning parents to this "between a rock and a hard place" situation when their children's growth and education are at stake. HB23-1079 shows Colorado's support and empowerment of parents.

Programs similar to BH23-1079 enacted in other states have proven to be very effective at improving overall educational outcomes (see references in footnotes), and are also very popular with parents. While there is likely to be a large amount of contention around bills like this, I believe that, once passed and put into place, significant benefits to families and education in our state will come to fruition. Colorado should be a leader in empowering students and families with a myriad of educational opportunities to best serve their children. **I urge you to support HB23-1079 in order to do just that.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Dorman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Dorman".

Mike Dorman

#### References:

Joshua Cowen (2008). School Choice as a Latent Variable: Estimating the “Complier Average Causal Effect” of Vouchers in Charlotte. *Policy Studies Journal*, 36(2). 301—315.

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Jay P. Greene and Ryan Marsh (2009). The Effect of Milwaukee’s Parental Choice Program on Student Achievement in Milwaukee Public Schools (School Choice Demonstration Project Report 11).

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