

TO: Members of the General Assembly

FROM: AFT Pennsylvania, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Children's Coalition of the Lehigh Valley, Education Voters Pennsylvania, Keystone State Education Coalition, National Council of Jewish Women – PA, PA Association of School Administrators, PA NAACP Education Committee, Penn Action, Pennsylvania Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, Pennsylvania Council of Churches, Pennsylvania League of Urban Schools, Public Citizens for Children and Youth, The Consortium for Public Education, The Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia

On behalf of our members, the undersigned organizations are writing to express our concern about the proposal to create a new Education Improvement Scholarship Credit (EISC) funded at a projected total cost of \$450 million over the next three years. Our organizations and our members strongly support Pennsylvania's Constitutional mandate of a "thorough and efficient" education for all, one which should provide every child with an opportunity to learn.

EISC, a proposed new tax credit program, would actually re-direct dollars away from the revenue collections and thus reduce the amount of revenue at a very real cost to the programs and services, including public education, which the Commonwealth provides to its citizens. Recent drastic cuts to state education funds have seriously affected the educational opportunities available to Pennsylvania children, especially in our poorest districts. At a time when the governor is justifying reductions in state funding to education and other services on account of the state's limited resources, \$450 million in lost revenue is a cost we cannot afford.

At present it seems we are unable, or unwilling, to provide adequate funding to our public school students so ALL students have an opportunity to learn: school districts are being forced to eliminate the very programs and supports which we know raise achievement among our most academically at risk students. If we can't provide kindergarten for the children in our own state capitol and other communities across the commonwealth, how can we justify diverting more tax dollars to private education?

The General Assembly has a constitutional obligation, first and foremost, to the students in our community public schools – the schools to which every child is guaranteed access. Strong public schools are vital to our economic prosperity and the health and vitality of our communities. We urge you to reject this costly proposal and focus on providing adequate funds to meet the needs and obligations of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania so that every child has the opportunity for a good education.