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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PUBLIC SCHOOLS FIRST NC OPPOSES VOUCHER BILL

Unaccountable Giveaway to Private Schools Undercuts Public Education

Raleigh, NC—June 3, 2013—Public Schools First NC is disappointed that the House Education Committee voted to advance House Bill 944 (“Opportunity Scholarship Act”) to the House Appropriations Committee. HB 944 would create a voucher program that undercuts public education by initially taking \$100 million out of the public school system and giving it away to private schools. This voucher program is designed to grow quickly and exponentially. Furthermore, because the bill does not hold private schools to the same standards of accountability as public schools, it creates an unequal playing field for students and uncertainty for taxpayers. If funded, this bill will sound the death knell to public schools.

“It is the first obligation of the General Assembly to fund the state’s public schools system adequately,” said Yevonne Brannon, chair, Public Schools First NC. “A vote to divert millions away from public schools is indefensible at a time when North Carolina has sunk to 48th in per pupil funding and 46th in teacher pay. North Carolina simply cannot afford a voucher program that gambles with our children and our money.”

Public Schools First NC instead advocates to fund proven strategies: keeping teacher assistants in the classroom, maintaining small class sizes in grades K-3, and expanding pre-K programs that help children arrive to school ready to learn. Public Schools First NC agrees that it is critical to expand choice for children who are struggling academically and encourages legislators to fund innovative solutions within our public schools.

The voucher program also creates a long-term obligation for taxpayers to fund a separate school system. “I think we have failed to account for all the costs related to this program,” noted John Eberhart, a retired school superintendent. “We are not accounting for the full duration of time that a student will need to keep receiving a voucher to cover all 13 years of schooling. The public must be realistic about the potential for this program to expand, as we should fully expect more people to claim an entitlement to vouchers, which will dig deeper into the resources available for public schools.”

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the voucher bill is the lack of accountability. On one hand, private schools do not have to open their doors and accept all children. Yet HB 944 asks taxpayers to fund private or religious schools, regardless of the quality of the school. Notably, taxpayer money will be supporting explicitly religious instruction in the majority of cases, as over two thirds of North Carolina's private schools are religious. This is a deeply problematic violation of the separation of church and state regardless of whether the religious affiliation is Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or any other religious tradition.

Public Schools First NC is proud of North Carolina's long-standing tradition of excellence in public education; attempts to privatize public education threaten economic prosperity and equity for all students.

In the words of NC State Representative Rick Glazier, "Public schools are the one institution that have bonded our people together as one nation under one flag with a common set of values—to lose that, to harm that, in any way is a serious blow to our democracy. Hundreds of private choices would do exactly that. They are PRIVATE choices. People should have those always available to them, but to suggest public policy ought to include supporting them with tax dollars is to undercut the unity public schools bring to communities, our state and the country."

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About Public Schools First NC:

Public Schools First NC (PSFNC) is a group of citizens, parents, teachers, businesses and organizations joining together to advocate for a first-rate public education system for all North Carolinians. To learn more or to join our organization, please visit: publicschoolsfirstnc.org. Follow us on Twitter: @PS1NC.