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Contact:

Natalie Beyer, Durham County, NC ([919-225-2300](tel:919-225-2300))

Dot Kendall Kearns, Guilford County, NC ([336-887-6177](tel:336-887-6177))

Yevonne Brannon, Wake County, NC ([919-576-0655](tel:919-576-0655))

OR Email: info@publicschoolsfirstnc.org

NC Lawmakers: Defend Our Public Schools

Today the NC House of Representatives will entertain Doug Tuthill from Florida as the NC House Education Committee prepares to consider HB944, a far-reaching plan to establish taxpayer-funded school vouchers in NC. HB944 (“Opportunity Scholarship Act”) would allow NC public tax dollars to be used in private, religious and for-profit schools. Mr. Tuthill is not a citizen of NC but is a paid advocate for school vouchers and privatization. He will speak at a 3 pm press conference convened by Representatives Brandon and Bryan (HB944 sponsors) and meet personally with legislators at 5 pm on Monday and at 9 am on Tuesday. His visit is timed to influence the House Education Committee as they consider HB944, a radical school voucher bill. Mr. Tuthill was also at the General Assembly in April to lobby for efforts to privatize public education. Rather than a Florida school voucher hired lobbyist, it would be useful to hear from citizens from Milwaukee or Cleveland where after decades and millions of dollars, school vouchers have not improved academic outcomes for children.

Public Schools First NC knows that research shows schools vouchers are not working in Florida (“Information Under load: Florida’s Flawed Special-Education Voucher Program”, June 2007). In 2011, Florida’s NAEP test scores were unimpressive dropping in all four key areas (“Jeb Bush, with Cash and Clout, Pushes Contentious School Reforms”, Reuters, Nov. 27, 2012). Many vouchers and corporate tax-credit programs fund private/for-profit schools in or use public dollars to teach various religious doctrines. The state of Florida commissioned David Figlio, Ph.D. from Northwestern University to perform an ongoing evaluation of Florida school vouchers. Figlio’s third study, Evaluation of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program Participation, Compliance, Test Scores and Parental Satisfaction in 2008-09, found “no substantial difference between FTC Scholarship Program participants and nonparticipants”. In 2010, \$140 million in tax revenue for school vouchers/tax-credits was diverted from Florida’s general fund making it unavailable for public schools and other essential services. In school voucher experiments across the country, the lack of accountability has led to misuse of tax dollars, fraud, and low quality education for children.

On lobbying junkets in other states Mr. Tuthill typically talks about school vouchers, tax credits, and “scholarships programs” as a plan to move public money into the private sector to solve student achievement challenges. NC is currently 48th in the nation in per pupil funding and HB944 will hurt NC’s schools and our ability to attract new jobs by draining off much-needed resources from our public schools. Worse, it distracts us from investing in our schools and our teachers serving all students as required by the NC Constitution. Across the country voters in states such as Indiana, South Dakota and Idaho have overturned many public education reforms based on the flawed-Florida model.

While private individuals, like Mr. Tuthill who runs a Scholarship Funding Organization in Florida, make money off of children from taxpayer dollars, polls show that 63% of NC citizens oppose school vouchers and profiteering from public funds. The National PTA “opposes any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system that diverts public funds to private or sectarian schools”. (www.pta.org “Position Statement – Education Emphasis”).

Public Schools First NC encourages our lawmakers to stand with NC citizens and invest in our schools. Expand opportunities within our public school system, like innovative programs and magnet schools, rather than dismantling our public schools and wasting our hard-earned tax dollars.

We ask our lawmakers in NC to step up for our children, teachers, and public schools by investing in our schools and lifting our students up from 48th in per pupil funding towards the national average. We encourage the General Assembly to listen to our public school teachers, parents, students and researchers and in every decision, strengthen our public schools.

Public schools across NC are under threat through proposed legislation that would expand school vouchers, increase class sizes, reduce accountability, cut teaching assistants and pay teachers poorly. These combined actions significantly undermine the quality of our public education system. Citizens can sign a growing petition opposing HB944. (http://action.ncjustice.org/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=10924)

Other Sources:

<http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2011-06-23/news/mckay-scholarship-program-sparks-a-cottage-industry-of-fraud-and-chaos/1/>

Another key article to review in its entirety:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/27/usa-education-bush-foundation-idUSL1E8MR08N20121127>

Creationist voucher schools in FL

<http://creationistvouchers.com/2012/11/30/creationist-voucher-schools-in-florida/>

Florida and School Vouchers <http://www.fundeducationnow.org/resource-room/voucher-school-programs/>

Lurking in the Bushes: Peeking at Florida Education Miracle

<http://cloakinginequity.com/2012/11/28/lurking-in-the-bushes-peeking-at-florida-education-miracle/>

<http://dianeravitch.net/2012/07/23/vouchers-for-special-education/>

Jay Mathew's column, Why Private School Vouchers Have No Future:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/why-private-school-vouchers-have-no-future/2012/11/21/5d212dfe-329e-11e2-bfd5-e202b6d7b501_story.html?wpmk=MK0000200

Quality controls lacking for D.C. schools accepting federal vouchers

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/quality-controls-lacking-for-dc-schools-accepting-federal-vouchers/2012/11/17/062bf97a-1e0d-11e2-b647-bb1668e64058_story.html

<http://urbanmilwaukee.com/2013/05/09/murphys-law-the-voucher-lobby/>

<http://dianeravitch.net/2012/07/23/vouchers-for-special-education/>

<http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/news/press-releases/crp-press-releases-2012/civil-rights-project-reports-deepening-segregation-and-challenges-educators-and-political-leaders-to-develop-positive-policies>

<http://prospect.org/article/teachers-left-behind>

http://www.citizen-times.com/article/20130516/OPINION03/305160007/Real-teacher-appreciation?nclick_check=1

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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