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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

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PRESS RELEASE

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, NEW YORK CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION, AND PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCATES REJECT DIVERSION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION DOLLARS

Assembly and Governor Must Stand Firm Against Education Investment Tax Credit

Groups Unite to Urge Public Dollars for Public Education

(Albany, N.Y.) The League of Women Voters, the New York Civil Liberties Union, public education advocates, and labor organizations gathered at the Capitol today to call on Governor Cuomo and Assembly Speaker Silver to stand firm against the senate's Education Investment Incentive Act. The state Senate's budget provision would provide tax credits to individuals, corporations, and partnerships that donate money to public schools, to privately operated charter schools and, through "education scholarships," to students who attend schools that provide religious education – creating a special class of education investors with significant influence in shaping education policy and funding direction.

Providing tax credits to education "investors" represents a bold step toward the further privatization of public education in New York State – in effect, underwriting the diversion of tax dollars to sectarian schools and charter schools. The proposal authorizes more than a half billion dollars in "education investment tax credits" in the next three years, money that would otherwise be paid to the state's general revenue fund. Deficits would have to be offset by raising taxes, or by distributing budget cuts across program and service areas – further jeopardizing the financial health of public schools.

"At a time when the state has continuously failed to fund public schools at levels ordered by the Court of Appeals in litigation initiated by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity more than a decade ago, New York simply cannot afford to drain millions of dollars from the state's general revenue fund to benefit privately operated schools," said **Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director for the League of Women Voters of New York State.**

"The Education Investment Incentives Act would divert more than a half a billion from the state's tax revenues to provide large tax credits to people and corporations that give money to religious schools and privately run charter schools" said **NYCLU Executive Director Donna Lieberman.** "This may be a clever end run around the separation of church and state, but it continues the state's shameful pattern of failing to provide adequate funding for public schools."

Jasmine Gripper, Statewide Education Advocate for Alliance for Quality Education said, "The proposed tax credit perpetuates the Hunger Games mentality toward education. It takes money that could and should be allocated to public education and gives it directly to wealthy donors. New York cannot afford to lose this revenue at a time where public schools are starved for resources."

"Our public schools and colleges have faced devastating budget cuts that have slashed programs and services for our students. This back-door voucher scheme would siphon hundreds of millions of dollars away from public schools, which serve the vast majority of our state's children, in favor of big tax giveaways for the wealthy," said **Andy Pallotta, NYSUT Executive Vice President.** "At a time when New York's public schools are drastically underfunded, taxpayer dollars cannot be diverted to donors of non-public, private and charter schools at the expense of public school students."

"Faced with a property tax cap, charter schools and inadequate state support, the last thing New York public schools need is a program that misdirects hundreds of millions of tax dollars that could be used to support public education and other services. We should be focusing on providing better resources to public schools, their students, parents and teachers, not creating a tax break for the benefactors of private schools," said **New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento.**

"This legislation would harm public education by reducing available state funds and therefore the state's capacity to properly fund public schools, especially those in need of additional assistance," said **Timothy G. Kremer, Executive Director of the New York State School Boards Association.** "Furthermore, it would violate both state and federal constitutional separation of church and state principles."

Our public schools are suffering now. Over 70 percent of our school districts are receiving less help from the state than in 2008-09, five years ago. The budgets put forward by the Governor, Assembly, and Senate all fall far short of delivering the help our schools need to avoid more damaging program reductions," said **Bob Lowry, Deputy Director, New York State Council of School Superintendents.** "It's uncertain how much new giving to schools - private or public - the tax credit will actually encourage. What is certain is that it would divert revenue from the state treasury, further weakening the state's ability to adequately support our public schools. The poorest schools are likely to benefit least from the credit and will suffer most from underfunding School Aid."

The groups are urging Governor Cuomo and Assembly Speaker Silver to soundly reject the tax credit in budget negotiations with the senate leadership.