

TO: The Honorable Josh Shapiro, Governor
The Honorable Dr. Khalid Mumin, Secretary of Education
The Honorable Members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

DATE: Wednesday, July 5, 2023

SUBJECT: Lifeline Scholarships

As state budget negotiations progress, the Governor and members of the legislature **have a unique opportunity to deliver true hope and opportunity to thousands of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable children.**

The Lifeline Scholarship Program (HB 1432 and SB 795)—introduced by Reps. Clint Owlett and Martina White and Sens. Judy Ward and Anthony Williams—**would help students trapped in Pennsylvania's lowest-performing 15 percent of public schools by providing scholarships to attend a school of their choice.**

We are encouraged that Governor Shapiro and many leaders in the legislature have continued to express support for Lifeline Scholarships, even amid unprecedented opposition.

Under the status quo, children across the commonwealth are falling behind. Among the 250,000 students trapped in failing schools across 39 counties in Pennsylvania, the majority are not proficient in math or English. Among elementary schools, a mere 7.6 percent of students are proficient in math; only 23.6 percent are proficient in English.

Thirty-three of the bottom 15 percent of high schools have zero students performing math at their grade level; six high schools have not a single student reading at their grade level. Minority, low-income students are overrepresented in these underperforming schools.

Without Lifeline Scholarships, we are setting our children up for failure before they even have an opportunity to succeed.

No student should remain trapped in a failing school because of their zip code. Lifeline Scholarships would give all students access to an excellent education—regardless of their family's socioeconomic status or their zip code.

We believe it is important to address some misinformation about Lifeline Scholarships that could threaten the educational opportunities of thousands of students.

Lifeline Scholarships do not take one cent of funding away from public schools. Instead, this program would create a separate fund, allowing school districts to keep all state, federal, and local tax dollars, even when a Lifeline Scholarship recipient leaves a public school for a private one.

The truth is **this program would save kids—and save public schools money.** Lifeline Scholarships would result in smaller class sizes, which would mean more focused learning and more funding per student.

The program provides \$5,000 and \$10,000 scholarships for students who wish to leave their assigned public school—a fraction of the \$21,300 per student that school districts receive.

The recent Commonwealth Court ruling said Pennsylvania’s funding system must ensure that “every student receives a **meaningful opportunity to succeed.**” Lifeline Scholarships are the way to deliver on that promise.

Lifeline Scholarships will give our most vulnerable students hope and the opportunity for a brighter future. It’s time we deliver an excellent education to all of Pennsylvania’s children.

Thank you for standing up for Pennsylvania’s students, families, and schools by supporting Lifeline Scholarships.

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