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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

The “Parental Choice in Education Act” (PCEA)

Governor’s Program Bill # 2 introduced May 11, 2015

Despite the failure to pass the proposed \$100 million Education Investment Incentives Act (EIIA) during the regular budget session, its proponents have pressured the Executive and the Legislature to try again. The PCEA is a \$150 million measure that is skewed even more heavily to private schools. In the EIIA, donors would have received income tax credits and the \$100 million provided was to be split 50/50 private/public. This bill, by comparison, provides \$50 million for tax credits connected to private school scholarship donations supporting an “Educational Scholarship” (ES) program while lowering the “public school” share dedicated to “public school entities” from \$50 million to \$20 million. The PCEA adds \$10 million for an Instructional Materials and Supplies Credit for all teachers (up to \$10 million cap, \$200 per teacher), and a “Family Choice Education Tax Credit” structured as a refundable personal income tax credit for tuition expenses (**this is a close relative of a state-funded school voucher**). The cost of this portion of the new bill is not capped, but the bill provides that it would be offered to all tuition-paying families with “incomes below \$60,000 a year” (\$500 per student limit). If the total estimated cost is \$150 million, we assume that this portion approximates \$70 million, but there is no cap. That amount, together with the \$50 million in the ES program, would drive at least \$120 million to support tuition costs of private schools, *more than twice the amount that would have been allocated under the EIIA*.

This bill primarily favors taxpayers who desire to support *private schools of their choice*. The ES program allocates state tax credit certificates through a first-come, first-serve process with no restriction on geographic distribution or the target institution’s need. Donors would receive a tax credit worth 75% of their donation UP TO \$1,000,000. As it did with the EIIA, the League strongly opposes this PCEA.

These are general considerations:

- **In light of the Legislature’s ongoing failure to fulfill the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit’s aims, the League supports the direction of taxpayer dollars primarily toward students attending public schools in high-needs school districts. This bill does the opposite.**
- **The League believes that these bills are inconsistent with our position in favor of progressive taxation because the donor portion greatly benefits wealthy individuals and corporations.**
- **The League of Women Voters of New York State believes that education aid should be allocated through a democratic and transparent legislative process, which the ES fails to do.**