

Submitted comments to the House Finance Subcommittee #1, Monday, Jan. 24, at 7 a.m., re HB784
Dr. Rachel Levy (Ashland, Virginia)

My name is Dr. Rachel Levy and I live in Ashland, Virginia, in the 55th House of Delegates District and the 9th State Senate District. I am a mother of three--I have one child in Hanover County Public Schools as well as two who are just graduated in 2021. I am also a teacher who has a PhD in Educational Leadership & Policy from VCU. I was a candidate for the 55th District seat in 2021.

I oppose HB784 because I support our public schools, because it's impractical, because it's unconstitutional, because it will only serve to subsidize affluent parents, and because the people in the districts where I live do not want vouchers, directly or via a back door.

Studies of the impact of vouchers on student performance show no difference in performance or show that public school students outperform their voucher-program peers.

Our public schools in Virginia are already chronically underfunded--Virginia ranks 41st in per-PK-12 student spending out of all states.

Voucher studies also show that vouchers tend to favor students from more affluent families and can drive economic and racial segregation. Most low-income families don't receive enough support to make use of school vouchers and so a bill like this will cause much needed public funding for our public schools to be diverted to affluent parents and their chosen private schools. Private schools that participate in voucher programs are generally free to reject or accept students based on perceived at-risk status, academic ability, religion, sexual orientation or gender-identity which allows private schools to discriminate against certain groups of students while raking in public funds.

On average, parents of students who switch to private schools with vouchers are not happier or more satisfied. Voucher schemes are especially harmful to rural communities which can ill afford to lose any funding and with whom local public schools are popular and cherished community centers and gathering places. School vouchers will destroy these cherished institutions in our rural communities--institutions which are already struggling from neglect and under-funding. My campaign in the 55th District, which is largely rural, knocked about 9500 doors in the past campaign cycle. The citizens of the 55th District love their public schools and want them to be stronger and fully funded and staffed. They don't want school vouchers.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for your service to our Commonwealth.