

Submitted online: Jan. 30, 2024

Senator Dave Murman, Chair, and Members of the Education Committee
State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

RE: LB1386 (Hansen, B.) – Establish an educational savings account for each student enrolled in an approved or accredited private, denominational or parochial school for qualified educational expenses as prescribed.

OPPOSE: *Please include this position statement from the League of Women Voters of Nebraska as part of the public hearing record for LB1386.*

Dear Senator Murman and Members of the Education Committee:

Since its founding in 1920 as a nonpartisan organization, the League of Women Voters has worked diligently for equal rights for all Americans. In its 2022-2024 Impact on Issues statement, the League asserts “every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.”

LB1386 states that it will “require the State Treasurer to establish an educational savings account for each student enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade at an approved or accredited private, denominational, or parochial school for use on qualified educational expenses as prescribed [and] to create a fund.” This bill clearly offers specific groups extra educational opportunities. It is in this tradition of civic engagement and equity that the League of Women Voters of Nebraska strongly opposes LB1386.

In states where education voucher systems have been implemented, results demonstrate a benefit only to families who already have access to multiple educational choices and to non-public schools (1). LB1386 would provide additional public funding for those families paying for non-public schools now, while not offering them any more choices than they currently have. Private schools quickly raise their fees when voucher programs are implemented (2). Those voucher programs, like this one, make no effort to provide the same benefit to all. Intentional, state-sanctioned, unequal opportunity is one of this bill’s defects.

Another is the lack of oversight of public funds. LB1386 provides that the State Treasurer will allocate public funds for the exclusive benefit of select private entities for “qualified educational expenses” with very little oversight. In addition to putting a strain on the State Treasurer’s Office, public funds should be used for the benefit of *the public*. This means everyone at large, not merely a favored few entities that provide no equally accessible public benefits themselves.

Additionally, not only would this bill *not help* students in our districts, especially those in rural districts that currently lack nearby private schools, it also would have a deleterious effect by

threatening their public school funding through depletion of state funds. This bill would enshrine unequal educational opportunity for all, at taxpayer expense.

The foremost question the Nebraska Unicameral should answer when crafting policy is: will this benefit *all* Nebraskans? If the answer is an unequivocal no, as in the case of LB1386 – with its negative economic and educational impacts – it should not be pursued as policy. For these reasons, the LWVNE is strongly opposed to LB1386 and asks that you do not advance this proposed legislation.

Sincerely,
Carol Goller, Education Policy Action Team, LWVNE
Taylor Sterba, Co-Director of Education Policy, LWVNE

1. Barnum, M. (2023, December 3). Vouchers helping students already in private schools, early data show. The Wall Street Journal. [vouchers-helping-families-already-in-private-school-early-data-show-47ced812](https://www.wsj.com/articles/vouchers-helping-families-already-in-private-school-early-data-show-47ced812)

2. Opsahl, R. (2023, May 11). Reynolds not concerned by private schools raising tuition because of ESA program. Iowa Capital Dispatch. <https://iowacapitaldispatch.com/2023/05/11/reynolds-not-concerned-by-private-schools-raising-tuition-because-of-esa-program/>