

Testimony of the Texas State Teachers Association

Regarding the Comptroller's Legislative Appropriations Request for Texas Education Freedom Accounts

My name is Brian Pena on behalf of the Texas State Teachers Association, representing educators across Texas. TSTA strongly opposes the comptroller's appropriation request for Texas Education Freedom Account.

The state is being asked to commit substantially more taxpayer money to a program that has not yet completed its first year of operation. Before committing additional funds, the Legislature should first be provided evidence of the program's success, that taxpayer dollars are being spent responsibly, and that vouchers are actually expanding educational opportunity rather than subsidizing families who were already paying for private education.

The evidence available today raises serious questions.

According to the comptroller's own data, **70 percent of students in grades 1–12 who received a voucher were previously enrolled in private school or homeschool.** Meanwhile, less than 2 percent of Texas public school families applied for a voucher. This makes it difficult to argue that the program is primarily expanding access to private education for students leaving public schools. Instead, a substantial portion of these taxpayer dollars are going to families who were already outside the public school system.

As a reminder, a voucher does **not guarantee admission** to a private school. A review of 59 voucher-approved private schools found that religious requirements, selective admissions, interviews, subjective “fit” determinations, transportation barriers, and additional fees proved to be a significant barrier to many families

The cost to clear the existing waiting list of primarily students already in private school would cost over \$2 billion, on top of the existing appropriation and \$300M LAR request. Before asking taxpayers for hundreds of millions—or billions—more, lawmakers should know who is benefiting, whether academic outcomes are improving, and actual data to prove the program's success.

Throughout the state school districts are closing schools, laying off staff, and increasing class sizes. The Legislature's priority should be **fully funding the public schools that educate the overwhelming majority of Texas children**, not expanding an unproven program before its results can even be properly evaluated.

We respectfully urge the Committee to reject the Comptroller's LAR request and allow the Legislature to evaluate the program based on evidence—not political talking points—before committing additional taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for your consideration.