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Utah Education Association Announces Legal Challenge Against Voucher Program

"I stand before you not just as the president of the Utah Education Association or a veteran educator but as a strong advocate for every child's right to a quality public education. I want to announce that UEA and others have filed a significant legal challenge to Utah's voucher program.

This lawsuit was filed on May 29, 2024 in the 3rd District Court against Governor Spencer Cox, Attorney General Sean Reyes, and the Alliance for Choice in Education (also known as ACE Scholarships, the voucher program manager.) The lawsuit is based on the grounds that the Utah Fits All voucher program does not fit all and, in fact, hurts public school students and educators.

It violates Utah's constitution, which clearly states that education should be free and open to all, and specifically delegates general control and supervision by the Utah State Board of Education, which protects the use of public funds for public education. Instead, the voucher program diverts \$82.5 million of taxpayer money to private schools, which are not free, not open to all, and not overseen by the Utah State Board of Education.

This lawsuit is a decisive and necessary step in defending the integrity of our public education system. The UEA, a staunch opponent of vouchers since 1971, stands firm in its commitment to public education. This legal action is a natural progression of our collective stance.

The specifics of the voucher program are troubling. It siphons critical resources from already underfunded public schools to pay for private school vouchers at a rate double what public school students receive. This discrepancy is not just unfair; it is a deliberate undermining of public education. A lobbyist for the program said they want to use it to destroy public education. Utah already spends less on public school students than nearly every other state.

The voucher program diverts funds from our already underfunded public schools—where 90% of our children learn—and places vulnerable students at risk by stripping away protections and accountability. This alarming situation should raise serious concerns about the future of our public education system in Utah.

Every student deserves neighborhood public schools that offer a sense of belonging, an opportunity to thrive, and lessons that equip them with essential skills for the future.

Instead of stripping funds from public schools, we should invest more in them. We need smaller class sizes, respectable salaries for our educators, and enhanced resources to adequately address the mental health of our students and the current educator shortage.

Let us be clear: the future of our children, the integrity of our public education system, and the principles of fairness and equity in Utah demand that we oppose this harmful program.

We call upon all Utahns to join us in this fight to ensure that our public schools receive the support they need to nurture the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and innovators.

Together, we will continue to fight for a future where every child has access to a high-quality public education."

President Renée Pinkney
Utah Education Association