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NERESA Chair

Dr. Tanya Turner
NERESA Vice-Chair

Dr. Otis L. Smallwood
NERESA Treasurer

May 31, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The superintendent members of the Northeast Regional Education Service Alliance (NERESA) would like to express their concerns with Senate Bill 406 & House Bill 823, both of which seek to expand the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Specifically, the superintendents are concerned with the negative financial impact this expansion would have on school districts in the northeast region of the state.

1. Most of the nineteen school districts in the northeast region are among the poorest in the state. This expansion will most certainly redistribute tax dollars away from school districts already struggling to meet the needs of their current student membership. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the county governments have the means to make up for any shortfalls generated by this expansion.
2. According to the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (NCOSBM), all counties except one are projected to see a decline in state public school funding as a result of this expansion. While most counties are projected to lose 1-2% in state funding, several counties are projected to lose much more. Hyde and Washington Counties are projected to lose 3%, Hertford County is projected to lose 4%, Pasquotank County is projected to lose 5%, Bertie County is expected to lose 7%, and Northampton County is expected to lose 8%.
3. In most of these northeast counties, the public school system is the county's largest employer. The loss of these state funds along with an expansion in the number of Opportunity Scholarships granted will most certainly equate to a loss of positions, thereby increasing unemployment in already economically depressed areas.
4. Private schools are not equally available to all students. Limited access to school choice in rural communities requires public schools to meet the needs (social, emotional and academic) of the diverse population they serve. Reducing funds undermines the public schools systems' ability to afford its tax paying citizens a high-quality education.

NERESA SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Beaufort County Schools
Bertie County Schools
Camden County Schools
Currituck County Schools

Dare County Schools
Edenton-Chowan County Schools
Gates County Schools
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Schools

Halifax County Schools
Hertford County Schools
Hyde County Schools

Martin County Schools
Northampton County Schools
Perquimans County Schools
Roanoke Rapids Graded Schools

Pitt County Schools
Tyrrell County Schools
Washington County Schools
Weldon City Schools

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5. Generous state dollars through the Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund have been awarded to Tier One counties, many of which are located in northeastern North Carolina, to modernize educational facilities. It is imperative to match this investment with appropriate funds to equip these facilities with high-quality staff and programs and any loss of education tax dollars would seem to undercut this investment.

Aside from the financial implications, there are also concerns over the consistency of instruction and accountability across four entirely different “systems” of education. While these bills may purport to increase competition in the education marketplace, that cannot be possible while private schools, homeschools, public charter schools, and traditional public schools are held to different standards, and with regards to homeschools and private schools, have little to no oversight to how state tax dollars are used. Traditional public schools and even public charter schools have to follow a host of state and federal mandates ranging from testing programs to prescribed instructional materials and programs to rules and regulations. We expect this level of accountability because we receive local, state, and federal tax dollars. Why then shouldn't private schools and homeschools be subject to the same rules, regulations, and mandates if they are also to be supported by these same state funds? Not demanding accountability or providing oversight of state-supported private and homeschools simply amounts to a double standard.

We are of the opinion that the Opportunity Scholarship expansion outlined in Senate Bill 406 and House Bill 823 will have very negative consequences for northeastern North Carolina. As we have outlined, there are a host of potential problems with this legislation. We urge our legislators to consider the impact to our public school districts in the northeast and abandon any efforts to expand this program.

Thank you so very much for your support and consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully,

Dr. Chris Mansfield
Executive Director, NERESA

CC: Dr. Barry Williams, Gates County Schools (Chair)
Dr. Tanya Turner, Perquimans County Schools (Vice-Chair)
Dr. Otis Smallwood, Bertie County Schools (Treasurer)
Dr. Matthew Cheeseman, Beaufort County Schools

NERESA SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Beaufort County Schools	Dare County Schools	Halifax County Schools	Martin County Schools	Pitt County Schools
Bertie County Schools	Edenton-Chowan County Schools	Hertford County Schools	Northampton County Schools	Tyrrell County Schools
Camden County Schools	Gates County Schools	Hyde County Schools	Perquimans County Schools	Washington County Schools
Currituck County Schools	Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Schools		Roanoke Rapids Graded Schools	Weldon City Schools

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Dr. Matt Lutz, Currituck County Schools
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Dr. Michael Sasscer, Edenton-Chowan Schools
Dr. Keith Parker, Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Schools
Dr. Eric Cunningham, Halifax County Schools
Dr. Jesse Pratt, Hertford County Schools
Dr. Melanie Shaver, Hyde County Schools
Dr. Michelle White, Martin County Schools
Dr. Rosa Atkins, Northampton County Schools
Dr. Ethan Lenker, Pitt County Schools
Dr. Juliana Thompson, Roanoke Rapids Graded School District
Dr. Karen Roseboro, Tyrrell County Schools
Dr. David O. White, Washington County Schools
Dr. Dannie Williams, Weldon City Schools

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