

The Honorable David A. LaRock
House of Delegates, P.O. Box 406
Richmond, Virginia 23218

January, 2016

Dear Delegate:

The Friedman Foundation's goal is to advance a K–12 education system in which all parents, regardless of race, origin, or family income, are free to choose a learning environment—public or private, near or far, religious or secular—that works best for them. The Foundation, a national leader in educational-choice research, policy development, and educational training and advocacy, continues its founders' mission of promoting educational choice as the most effective and equitable way to improve K–12 education in the United States.

In view of Virginia's ongoing commitment to improve educational outcomes for all children, knowing education is a key to economic growth and development for the Commonwealth, the undersigned join us in endorsing the following 2016 Policy Statement:

School Choice is Essential to Achieving a Strong Economy and Better Educational Outcomes

We believe that school choice is essential to unlocking the full potential of Virginia's education system, requiring a diversified approach to achieve success in education and economic development, and to improve Virginia's competitiveness and quality of life.

The focus of the undersigned leaders is to develop an educational funding system that will,

- Offer educational opportunity to all children, regardless of their circumstances in life,
- Invigorate parental involvement, simultaneously helping students find more suitable educational resources, and minimizing legal conflicts between parents and school districts,
- Permit students greater control and more flexibility over their education, and
- Save the Commonwealth money by reducing the growth of per-pupil expenditures.

Education spending is Virginia's largest budget expense, taking up more than 36% of the state budget, yet high school seniors are no better off academically than those of the 1970's. Despite inflation adjusted education spending rising more than 130%, there is a 25-point achievement gap in reading between white

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students and black students in 4th grade. This gap grows to 26 points by 8th grade. Virginia's education system is stagnant. We can do better. We must do better.

A diversified approach to school choice options in Virginia offers the best opportunity for Virginians to create quality educational options serving the greatest number of students and families. Consider that during the past five years alone, 21 states enacted 33 school choice programs, including five education savings account programs (ESA), two individual refundable tax credits, 12 vouchers, 12 tax credit scholarship programs, and two individual tax deductions. Sixteen states have multiple school choice programs, as many as five programs in a single state (Arizona, Ohio, and Wisconsin). A variety of school choice options works well.

Existing Education Improvement Scholarship Tax Credit (EISTC) scholarships offer the first opportunity, and should be significantly expanded. Scholarship granting organizations should be encouraged to work directly with subsets of schools, to maximize fundraising potential in communities, support parents as they seek the right schools for their children, and to create a true community spirit that recognizes the strength in bringing people together for the benefit of their children and the future of their community.

Pursuing public school choice through charter schools would offer different kinds of schools, and a different kind of choice in education. Virtual schools, public and nonpublic, would vastly expand opportunities for children, allowing outreach to almost limitless educational providers.

Finally, the newest and potentially most innovative form of school choice, Education Savings Accounts, would allow parents the greatest flexibility to choose educational options best suited for their children's needs, and would meet Virginia's educational challenges head on by,

- Creating real improvement in educational outcomes for pupils, as attested by empirical studies examining academic outcomes for school choice,
- Matching students with academic resources best suited for them and their particular needs,
- Saving state education dollars (Goldwater Institute analysis of Arizona's ESA program estimates that for every 5,000 children using savings accounts, the state saves \$12.3 million),
- Saving local education dollars (for every pupil that opts to use a PCESA, the local school district would retain 100% of their local funding), and
- Making Virginia appealing to employees and businesses who are considering the Commonwealth as a permanent business destination (as experienced in states with the broadest school choice programs, like Indiana).

We support the expansion of the EISTC, charter schools, virtual online schools, Education Savings Accounts, and any other innovative school choice opportunities that will empower parents in Virginia with the freedom to choose what's best for their children's education, and to achieve the goals outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,



Leslie Davis Hiner, Esq.
Vice President of Programs
The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice



Brittany Corona
State Program and Government Relations Director
The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

Additional signatures on next page

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The Hon. Gerard Robinson
Former Virginia Secretary of Education



The Hon. Kenneth T. Cuccinelli, II
Former Virginia Attorney General



The Hon. Barry E. Stern, Ph.D.
Education and Workforce Dev. Consultant
Former U.S. Deputy Asst. Sec. of Education



Senator Glen Sturtevant
Former Richmond City School Board



Jonathan Butcher, Education Director Goldwater
Institute



The Hon. Jill Turgeon*
Loudoun County School Board



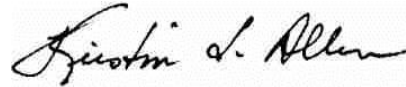
The Hon. Mychele Brickner
Former Fairfax County School Board



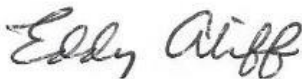
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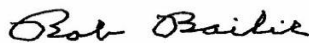
Kristin L. Allen, President
Virginia Education Coalition, LLC



Rev. Eddie Aliff, Executive Director
Virginia Assembly of Independent Baptists



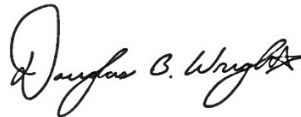
Don Blake, Chairman
Virginia Christian Alliance



Bob Bailie, Founder
Founder, Middle Resolution PAC



Tyler Foote, State Director
Americans for Prosperity Fdn. – Virginia



Pastor Douglas B. Wright, President
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The Hon. Heather Cordasco
Former James City County School Board

*personal endorsement not representing official organization