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SENATE APPROPRIATIONS VOTED TO EXPAND VOUCHER FUNDING

Today's vote by the NC Senate Appropriations Committee to expand funding for NC's voucher program through Senate Bill 406 at the same time our public schools—which educate the overwhelming majority of students in our state—are starved for funding and teachers are leaving the profession at the highest rate in decades, is an absolute abdication of their constitutional responsibilities to their constituents.

When factoring in the average 50% usage rate for families offered vouchers in past years, there are sufficient funds currently allocated to fulfill Tier 1 and Tier 2 applicant requests. Only the wealthier applicants in Tiers 3 and 4 will be left without the state private school subsidy. The NC General Assembly members must not adopt welfare for the wealthy. When being sworn in at the beginning of their term, each member makes a pledge to uphold our state constitution, which clearly states an obligation to create and maintain a public school system. Let's hold them to it.

Note: During the committee meeting, at least one member confused their constitutional obligation, stating that members were obligated to provide a "free education" for all students. He neglected the important "**public**" word that factors prominently in the state constitution, which requires a "free public education" for all students.

Instead of pandering to private schools and wealthy families, the NC Senate should be spending their time addressing the crisis in public education created by a decade of insufficient funding and deliberate attacks on educators. Our teacher turnover rates have skyrocketed due to low pay.

Governor Cooper's budget sets out the essential steps and smart funding priorities needed to bring teacher pay to a competitive level, add teaching assistants, fund school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses, expand programs for new teachers, and many other items that should take priority over private school vouchers.

Public Schools First NC's Communications Director, Dr. Heather Koons urged legislators to adopt Governor Cooper's budget. **"It's time for legislators to take their real constitutional obligation seriously and fully fund and staff our public schools. It is time to stop funding school vouchers. Public tax dollars belong in public schools!"**