



PRESS RELEASE

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Joint statement regarding the South Carolina Senate passing the Education Scholarships Account bill

CHARLESTON—Below is a joint statement from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston, the South Carolina Independent School Association, and the South Carolina Association of Christian Schools regarding the Education Scholarships Account bill, S 935, passed by the South Carolina Senate.

“We applaud the S.C. Senate’s passage of the Education Scholarships Account (ESA) legislation, by a vote of 25 to 15, to expand education choice in our state. Unfortunately, the bill now includes an amendment sponsored by Sen. A. Shane Massey that ESA scholarship students be administered the same state testing used in public schools. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, many choice programs have been passed or expanded across the nation. *However, no education savings account law in the United States forces non-public schools to participate in state-mandated testing to take part in a choice program.* Non-public schools employ different curriculae in their teaching. Requiring testing which is driven by a different curriculum is a recipe for the failure of this modest ESA program.

“The South Carolina Association of Christian Schools, South Carolina Independent School Association and Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston firmly and unequivocally oppose this testing amendment for school choice. **Under the Senate version, there will be little to no participation by non-public schools.**

“The Senate also made efforts to expand the legislation to include other families in this program, providing choice to more South Carolinians. A very modest version of this effort would have opened scholarships to families above the Medicaid eligibility level – only if there were scholarships remaining under the existing caps. Unfortunately, those efforts did not succeed. We support such efforts to make choice more available.

“While we stand committed to ESAs and their benefits to all students in our state, we must state unequivocally that, in its current form, with the inclusion of mandated state testing, the bill will not provide scholarship opportunities in our schools. We call on the Senate and House leadership to rectify this situation to assist us in bringing quality education to all children.”

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