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Texas Disability Rights Advocates Unite to Oppose School Voucher Program

[Austin, Texas] – A diverse coalition of disability rights advocates, organizations and individuals committed to advancing the rights and well-being of students with disabilities has joined forces to express their strong opposition to the proposed establishment of a school voucher program or an Education Savings Account program.

The coalition is deeply concerned about the potential consequences of such a program, which could jeopardize federal and state protections for students with disabilities and their families within private schools.

Key concerns of the coalition include:

1. **Loss of Protections:** Private schools are not required to provide students with disabilities or their families with vital guarantees and protections set by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or other state and federal laws. Students and their families will lose essential safeguards and support systems, endangering their educational rights.
2. **Discrimination:** Private schools are allowed to deny admittance to students for any reason. The vast majority of private schools do not accept students with disabilities, particularly those with moderate and significant academic, medical or behavioral support needs.
3. **Lack of Accountability:** Private schools receiving voucher funds lack the rigorous accountability mechanisms in place for public schools. This absence of oversight can result in inadequate academic and student outcomes, hindering the quality of education for students with disabilities.
4. **Increased Segregation:** A voucher program may lead to increased segregation of students with disabilities, as private schools are not required to educate children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which public schools are required to do under IDEA. This separation further isolates and stigmatizes students with disabilities.
5. **Insufficient Funds:** When a child leaves the public school, they take funding with them. The children left in public schools are then increasingly at risk of receiving lower-quality services as the pool of funding shrinks. Additionally, as students with disabilities with

low support needs exit public school, there is less funding to serve students with higher needs.

In addition to the aforementioned concerns, we must address the existing crisis of special education services underfunding in public schools. Texas currently underfunds special education by [\\$2.1 billion annually](#). Further, Texas was [fined \\$33.3 million by the federal government](#) for illegally decreasing special education funding during the 2016-2017 school year. This crisis in funding must be addressed, and the legislature should prioritize adopting the formula based funding recommendations in the [Special Education Funding Commission's final report](#), which would ensure students with disabilities in Texas public schools are appropriately served.

The coalition firmly believes that all students, regardless of their disability, deserve equitable access to high-quality education and the full protection of their educational rights. We urge policymakers and the community to consider the potential consequences of a school voucher program on these vital principles. We are committed to continued advocacy and collaboration to ensure that students with disabilities receive the support, services and protections they need to thrive within our educational system.

For media inquiries or further information, please contact Jolene Sanders with the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities at 512-478-3366 x312 or jsanders@txdisabilities.org.

