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April 26, 2019

Democratic Chairman James R. Roebuck, Jr.
House Education Committee
209 Irvis Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Roebuck:

As advocates for high-quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania, we write with grave concerns about House Bill 800, an ill-conceived funding plan for private school vouchers that would also benefit religious schools. The bill would provide a massive funding increase for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) this year, nearly doubling the current allocation for the program and automatically increasing annual funding by 10% each year thereafter. By increasing the business tax reductions that can be diverted to private/religious schools and lowering General Fund revenue available to support public education, the bill would take the Legislature further from its constitutional obligation to support and fund the Commonwealth's public schools.

We advocate on behalf of the students most in need of quality educational options in their communities – children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness. These students are the most harmed by the inadequate state funding of our public schools.

Existing tax credit programs provide millions of dollars in tuition assistance for families whose children attend elite, expensive private schools and private religious schools, and HB 800 would increase the income limit for families to qualify to as high as \$125,000 for a family with two children. In addition, Pennsylvania law allows private schools to discriminate against students, including for their disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and gender identity/expression, leaving marginalized students shut out with limited protections should they attend these schools.

With public schools so inadequately and inequitably funded that rich districts with their own resources have a third more funding per student than poor districts, we urge the Legislature to focus attention on fixing our public education funding, rather than further devastating it through tax credit vouchers. We strongly urge you to oppose HB 800.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Gordon Klehr, Executive Director
Reynelle Brown Staley, Policy Director

Ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have equal access to a quality public education.