

## Proposed Parents' Rights Act

### Background

Public school education is compulsory in the United States, meaning it is required that all American children are educated in some way until at least 18 years of age. Because it is required, we have public school systems in place to provide those services free of charge.

But public education, like any government-run system, has its problems. Sometimes those issues have to do with the quality of the education provided in certain areas. At other times, the issue is that parents disagree with the content of the education provided by the school district. In Northern Virginia, there are a number of efforts to recall elected members of boards of education because these boards have approved the introduction of ideas like critical race theory, gender malleability, and programs that teach young children about sexual orientation. These are sensitive issues that many parents feel should be left to them.

In response, a number of alternatives have been advocated. Among the more popular are the ideas of school vouchers, school choice, and charter schools. School vouchers and school choice go hand in hand because vouchers would allow parents to take the money allocated for their child's education to any school, public or private school of their choice. Charter schools are privately run public schools empowered to use other approaches to create education programs that would offer a better education than their government-run counterparts. All of them have been tried in different parts of the country with different results, but the underlying reason parents seek these options comes down to the idea of parents' rights. Parents want to exert the right to have their children educated as they see fit when they feel that government-run schools fail to educate their children or force ideologies on their children parents do not approve of.

Parents' right to control their children's education is the silent issue we face today in public education. School boards are elected by all of the taxpayers of a particular district and not by the parents whose children receive the education. Teacher's unions exert another layer of control over the education a child receives, often over the disagreement of students. While school choice, school vouchers, and charter schools can offer parents greater control over their children's education, the fundamental struggle is over parents' rights.

Over the last 50 years, the public school system has taken on greater roles beyond providing academic education. Schools have taken on responsibilities that have historically been the responsibilities of parents. For example, most children no longer get their first lessons in adult sexuality from their parents. Schools have taken that role from parents and often provide access to birth control and abortions without the knowledge or consent of the parent. Schools have

begun to redefine gender and race identity against the belief systems of parents. Schools have also taken it on themselves to define children's moral, ethical, racial, and gender identity beliefs without the knowledge or consent of parents under cover of education. Every year, school systems insert themselves more and more into the lives of children in ways that take them out of the mentorship of their parents on critical issues.

The heart of our religious freedom is the right of families to determine their own moral beliefs without government interference. Boards of education and teacher's unions have abused their power and have placed schools into the role of shaping our children's beliefs without our consent. Boards of Education are created by state statute, and the powers of these boards must therefore be limited by statute. The system is out of balance, and our children must be protected from those who would use public education to determine the moral, ethical, and even political beliefs of our children. We need to restore balance within our education system

### **Proposal**

To return the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit, the Virginia legislature should amend the statutes governing public education and school boards to include a Parent Association provision. The statute would formally recognize the parents of students within a school system and give them the right to approve or reject non-academic material introduced into their respective school system. The Parent Associations would elect officers whose responsibility would be to interface with the school board and teacher's unions to gather the related materials to be presented to the Parent Association members for a vote. Measures would be approved only by the approval of 60% of the parent body. Parents would not have power over core academic subjects but would have the power to review reading materials such as literature used in teaching.

### **Benefits of Establishing Parent Associations Through Statute.**

1. Weakness of School Voucher programs - To fight fraud, government money, in the form of a voucher, would have to come with strings attached. Future elected officials could require the teaching of objectionable material such as Critical Race Theory and gender identity to receive government money. These additional requirements would extend government control and influence in private institutions. We see this in higher learning and with Title IX, where the government uses the withholding of funds to force the compliance of private institutions.
2. Weakness of School Choice Program in General - Zoning laws and other impediments make it very difficult to open new schools. In reality, there are not enough available seats outside of public schools to accommodate a large number of schooling options. As we have seen in states with school choice programs, significant numbers of parents are forced to remain in existing schools. The limited number of alternative seats force lottery systems on parents and limit their choices.
3. Protection of Private Schools from Government overreach - Charter and magnet schools would be protected from government interference. Parent Associations would have the

- power to limit overreaching programs and provide parental balance on non-academic curricula. It would put parents on equal standing with school boards and teacher's unions.
4. Parental involvement in education has long been identified as the number one factor in a child's education success. Empowered Parent Associates would increase parental involvement in public education by giving parents statutory powers to guide their children's education.

### **Conclusion**

Because no system is perfect, empowering stakeholders is the first best way to limit the power of government in education. Even the Founding Fathers saw the Bill of Rights as essential in preventing abuse of our constitution. Empowering Parent Associations in the Commonwealth of Virginia would restore balance to a broken system that is determined to exclude parental oversight.