

PUBLIC POLICY HIGHLIGHTS JULY 2023

PA Budget Update:

This year, advocates were challenged by Governor Shapiro's position on school vouchers – Lifeline Scholarships. During the campaign, he vowed to not fund vouchers until the unconstitutional PA school funding system was addressed and our schools were fully funded. This campaign pledge has been removed from his website and during budget negotiations, his Education Secretary responded to questions from the Senate for his nomination reiterating the Governor's commitment to the vouchers. The Senate revised the program to add many components that the Governor objected to such as no income limits and lack of reporting and called the program: the Pennsylvania Award for Student Success (PASS). First, the program was included in gutted bill HB479 and passed almost completely on party lines. However, this bill was soundly defeated by the House Rules Committee and the Democratic House leadership declared that vouchers were dead on arrival. For more on this process see:

PA Gov. Josh Shapiro will abandon school voucher push · Spotlight PA

From Education Voters of PA:

Thanks to advocates and House Democrats (and with a promise from Gov. Shapiro), school vouchers will NOT be part of the 2023-2024 state budget.

The hundreds of phone calls you made and thousands of emails you sent helped to stop school vouchers in their tracks. Without your advocacy, we could be looking at the beginning of a billionaire-backed plan to replace our public school system with taxpayer-funded vouchers in the commonwealth. THANK YOU!!!!

What is in the 2023-2024 budget that was passed by the House and Senate?

New investments in education in the 2023-2024 budget approved by the House and Senate include:

- A \$567 million increase (7.8%) in basic education funding,
- A \$50 million increase (3.7%) in special education funding.
- \$100 million for Level Up, targeted to 100 of the most underfunded districts.
- A \$14 million increase (13%) in career and technical education, plus a \$9.5 million increase in CTE equipment grants.
- A \$10.4 million increase (3%) for early intervention for children three to five, and an early intervention increase of \$15.4 million (9%) for children birth to three.
- No new funding was included for pre-K, school facilities, or environmental repairs.

As of Friday, July 7, 2023, there has yet to be an officially signed budget. The following steps must be completed in the state budget process before the new spending plan is finalized:

- The Senate must return to sign the general appropriations bill.
- Then it will go to the Governor's desk.
- The Governor has stated that he will sign the bill with a line-item veto of the PASS scholarship program (lifeline scholarships).
- The accompanying code bills also need to be agreed to and considered in the general assembly.

AAUW PA members participated in the outreach to stop the diversion of taxpayer dollars to fund private school education. This *War on Vouchers* is not over but we won this first battle. We will keep you posted.

Great Synposis for you if interested in the budget impasse: <u>10 things you need to know</u> about PA's budget impasse - City & State Pennsylvania (cityandstatepa.com)

Cyber Charter School Reform: House Bill 1422 was passed by the House 122-81. This bi-partisan approval is the first major revision to the Charter School Law since 2002 when cyber schools were added to the continuum of public education in PA. Here is an excellent summary of the bill: <u>HB-1422-Summary.pdf (edvoterspa.org)</u>

From AAUW PA Harrisburg's Kathy Gates:

Women2Women - Women2Women is the only women's organization that briefs Congress directly on issues important to women. Sign up for their emails to express your opinion about woman-related issues. They are even starting a book club. I can't wait to see what female-forward read they recommend that has us thinking. See https://www.w2wtour.com/ for more information.

Fair Districts PA - The May 31 Zoom forum, *Pennsylvania Redistricting: Lessons Learned and Next Steps for Reform*, was attended by around 250 Pennsylvanians eager for change. It was an informative session and served as a good re-energizer and segue to our return to redistricting reform efforts this fall. Here is a summary of the meeting which also includes a link to the recording of the session. *Lessons Learned and Next Steps for Reform | Fair Districts PA* Sign up for their e-mails at <u>https://www.fairdistrictspa.com/</u>

Is it time to amend the PA Constitution to offer open elections to independents? - Pennsylvania's primary election system is a closed shop: Only registered Democrats and Republicans can vote in races that affect the lives of every Pennsylvanian. In April, state **Sens. Dan Laughlin, R-Erie**, and **Lisa Boscola, D-Northampton**, formally <u>introduced legislation</u> that would <u>allow unaffiliated voters to participate</u> in the taxpayer-funded elections. The measure is now before the <u>Senate's State Government</u> <u>Committee</u>. Pennsylvania is one of only nine states that bar independent voters from participating in primary elections.

League of Women Voters (LWV) – The Harrisburg & Carlisle have merged together to better serve the areas. For both organizations, the merger holds the promise of a fresh start, filled with energy, determination and a renewed commitment to the work of protecting our democratic electoral process. Together as they move forward, they will be known as **The League of Women Voters of the PA Capital Region (LWVPACAPREG).** See their new website at <u>www.lwvpacapreg.org</u>. Interested in joining? You can do that on the website.

Being an informed voter is the first step toward active citizenship. Go one step further by advocating for change, volunteering, becoming a poll worker, or even running for office.

Cease Fire PA – this non-profit organization addresses each major source of devastation by bringing together more than 130 organizations to advocate for solutions that will save lives. See their website at <u>www.ceasefirepa.org</u> to see what accomplishments they have recently accomplished to get legislation passed since the March rally on the Capitol steps. Sign up for their e-mails. Congratulations CeaseFirePA.

EveryLibrary – Watch for a new documentary called "97 – The Fight for the Freedom to Read". If you missed the live online presentation on Thursday, June 29th, be sure to watch this presentation. Jodi Picoult, author, three students and the film's producers were interviewed to express outrage at book banning in this country and how it is affecting students' lives. See interviews with parents and students who are working to bring attention to this crisis. They are encouraging everyone to speak out in their communities to fight the few extremists who have managed to get books banned from libraries. See <u>www.97documentary.com</u> for the progress of the making of this film and when it will be available.

Kathy: Thank you for the great summary of these important topics

Family Care Act/Paid Leave Update: House Bill 181

This bill has been re-committed to the Rules Committee on June 6 and we will be watching for it when the House returns from recess. Please see PA House of Representatives website for the bill: <u>Bill Information - House Bill 181; Regular Session</u> 2023-2024 - PA General Assembly (state.pa.us) <u>Pennsylvania House Labor & Industry votes on paid leave legislation (pahouse.com)</u>

FROM AAUW NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY STAFF:

National/federal issues update:

- Federal Legislative updates:
 - o Title IX anniversary last month
 - § The Gender Equity in Education Act introduced: <u>https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/geea/</u>
 § AAUW signed a coalition letter urging the Department of Ed to finalize Title IX rules before the 2023-23 school year: <u>https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Letter-from-75-Organizations-to-Biden-re-Final-Title-IX-Rule-6.23.23.pdf</u>

• The Equality Act introduced: <u>https://www.aauw.org/act/two-</u> <u>minute-activist/equality-act/</u>)

 Equal Rights Amendment – in a very challenging situation right now, now closely associated with repro rights, LGBTQ+ rights, more dramatically caught up in culture wars

• Executive & Supreme Court updates

Proposed rules on salary history – AAUW signed coalition
 letter in support; hoping to see quick turnaround (several months):

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5671b46c841aba9a6fc7b a33/t/64879c46bf2eb2433413801d/1686608967468/Equal+Pay +Today+Sign-

<u>On+Comments+In+Support+of+OPM+Proposed+Rule+to+Proh</u> <u>ibit+Use+of+Prior+Salary+History+6+12+23.pdf</u> Pushing administration to put in place similar salary history rules for federal contractors

 Last week at the Supreme Court: two cases on student debt, two on affirmative action. You can find our press releases on the cases here:

https://www.aauw.org/resources/news/media/press-releases/