

FACT SHEET

Keep Faith Free, Keep Schools Free, Keep Kids Learning

Why Illinois Should Opt Out of the Federal School Voucher Program

What Happened?

For the first time in American history, Congress has created a national school voucher program. Tucked into the "One Big Beautiful Bill" — signed by President Trump on July 4, 2025 — the program allows individuals to claim a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit of up to \$1,700 for contributions to nonprofit scholarship-granting organizations, which then distribute tuition funds to private, often religious, schools. It passed without a single Democratic vote, with Vice President JD Vance casting the tiebreaking vote in the Senate.

The good news: Illinois does not have to participate. Governor Pritzker has the authority to opt out. We are asking him to use it.

What Is at Stake for Illinois?

- Illinois public schools serve 9 out of 10 children in the state — and they are already underfunded by billions of dollars.
- This program does not create new money. It diverts existing public tax dollars into private institutions, deepening the shortfall for the schools that serve the vast majority of Illinois families.
- 26 million students nationally depend on Title I funding for reading specialists, smaller class sizes, after-school programs, and early education. Voucher programs compound the funding pressures those schools already face.
- 7.5 million students with disabilities are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) — a federal civil rights law. Children who use vouchers to attend private schools waive those protections entirely, losing access to Individualized Education Programs and the federal oversight that enforces their rights.
- Up to 420,000 teaching and support staff positions are at risk nationally as federal education funding is cut and reorganized.

What Illinois Faith Leaders Believe

Religious freedom is not only defended in courtrooms and legislatures. It is lived — in congregations, in communities, and in the public schools where children of every faith and background learn what it means to share a life together. When those schools are weakened, the communities they sustain are weakened. And when communities weaken, religious freedom becomes a principle on paper rather than a reality on the ground.

The Ask

Governor Pritzker: opt out of the federal school voucher program. In doing so, you will protect Illinois' public schools, defend the civil rights of the most vulnerable children in this state, and uphold the principle that in Illinois, faith is free — not funded, not coerced, and not entangled with the power of the state.