

Illinois Clergy and Faith Leaders

Federal School Voucher Program — Urging Governor Pritzker to Opt Out

1. We are for faith that does not require the state's money or the state's endorsement to flourish.

For generations, people of faith in this country have insisted that the government has no business in matters of conscience. Faith that requires a government check to survive is not free faith. It is dependent faith. And dependent faith is not what our traditions teach.

2. Directing tax dollars to private religious schools crosses a line our founders drew.

For the first time in our nation's history, federal tax dollars are being directed to private religious schools through the "One Big Beautiful Bill." What looks like philanthropy on paper is, in practice, every taxpayer subsidizing religious education — whether they share that faith or not. That is precisely the entanglement between government and religion that the First Amendment was written to prevent.

3. In Illinois, this money comes out of our children's classrooms.

Nine out of ten Illinois children attend public schools. Those schools are already underfunded. This program does not create new money — it diverts existing public dollars away from the schools that serve the overwhelming majority of our communities. When we drain those schools, we drain the places where our neighbors' children learn, grow, and belong.

4. This program asks families to trade their children's rights for access.

Children who use these vouchers to attend private schools lose legal protections against discrimination on the basis of religion, disability, gender, and sexual orientation. As faith leaders, we cannot be silent about that. A program that narrows who belongs is a program that narrows freedom — for everyone.

5. Illinois has a choice. Not every state does.

The voucher program only takes effect in states that opt in. Governor Pritzker has the authority to decline. That authority is not a technicality — it is an opportunity. Illinois can stand for public schools, for religious freedom, and for the communities that depend on both.

6. Governor, and elected officials, we are asking you to lead.

We are not asking you to take a political position. We are asking you to uphold a principle that Illinois has long defended: that government and religion are strongest when they remain separate, and that every child in this state deserves a school that must take them in, protect them, and treat them with dignity.