

Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Schweyer, and esteemed members of the PA House Appropriations and Education Committees.

My name is John Bynam, and I proudly serve as the Assistant District Leader for 32BJ SEIU, the union that represents school bus drivers, building engineers, asbestos workers, electricians, HVAC technicians, cleaners, and other public-school workers.

Today, I am honored to testify on behalf of our dedicated members who work tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of our students.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Chairman Harris and Chairman Schweyer for inviting us to participate in today's joint hearing. The theme of today's panel, "Our Union Partners," resonates deeply with the 32BJ members.

We strive to collaborate with public schools, teachers, and other staff to create safe and secure learning environments for our students.

At 32BJ SEIU, we take pride in our partnership with the school system, offering valuable training programs that empower our members and contribute to the overall well-being of the educational community.

From mold awareness to CPR, HVAC, boiler, and electrician classes, as well as conflict resolution training, we are committed to enhancing the skills of our members to better serve the students.

Our members are not just employees; they are dedicated, long-term public servants. I, myself, started as a school bus driver almost 25 years ago, and over half of our school bus members have been on the job for more than two decades.

We sometimes refer to the students we transport as our "precious cargo," as many of them are our own kids, hailing from the same communities.

We are deeply invested in the success of our public school system.

However, our commitment to education goes beyond our day-to-day duties. We witness firsthand the challenges stemming from inadequate resources and crumbling infrastructure, especially in low-income communities.

Earlier this year, a [state court ruled](#) that some of our schools are so underfunded that they violate student's constitutional right to an education.

According to the ruling, the spending from district to district was so unequal that it violated the state's equal protection clause.

As reported in the Washington Post, one elementary school teacher talked about having to teach in a class that had a hole in the ceiling where “they could literally look up and see the sky.”

That is why it is sad to see that amidst these challenges, Senate Republicans are proposing to divert \$100 million in public funds to create a school voucher program for private schools.

Our children and communities deserve better.

The solution doesn't lie in selective private schools, which tend to [benefit wealthier families who are already paying private school tuition](#). [Studies in other states show voucher programs do not improve educational outcomes for students](#).

Neither does the answer lie in charter schools, which do not have the same rigorous requirements that public schools do. [Unlike at public schools in Philadelphia, regular teachers at charter schools are not required to be certified](#).

The real answer is in fully and equitably funding our public schools, investing in, and rebuilding our infrastructure.

Public schools are the bedrock of our communities, shaping the next generation of teachers, nurses, professionals, business owners, and leaders.

They also provide stable, union jobs with fair wages and benefits, ensuring the retention of experienced and dedicated employees, ultimately creating a safer and more nurturing environment for our children.

In conclusion, let us unite in our commitment to fully support and invest in our public schools.

By doing so, we not only secure a brighter future for our children but also strengthen the foundation of our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration. Together, we can build a future where every child can thrive.