Statement for the Record
of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
More Choices, Brighter Futures: Expanding Education Freedom
October 23, 2026 | Field Hearing

Last year, President Trump and congressional Republicans passed their "Big, Ugly Bill," which includes the nation's first private school voucher program, paid for with taxpayer dollars. They say they want to "return education to the states," but this federal school voucher program is a radical effort that could cost an estimated $26 billion annually by 2030. Some estimates put the cost at potentially $187 billion annually or more; this is well over all federal spending on K-12 education combined.

School choice programs already exist in many states: magnet schools; intradistrict and interdistrict public school programs; and accountable, non-profit charter schools are examples of quality public school choice options that many Democrats support. These options allow students to receive a free education within the oversight of the public education system while upholding students' rights and ensuring accountability for student outcomes. Public school choice must come with sufficient information and support for all parents to make informed decisions among quality public options in a manner that does not exacerbate racial or socioeconomic isolation in public schools and remains subject to federal, state, and local oversight and accountability requirements.

Many states also have education tax credit and school voucher programs similar to the new federal program. These state programs have been shown to increase segregation and may hurt rural communities. They also often benefit those already attending private schools. In some states, costs have far exceeded projections, forcing states to make cuts elsewhere in their budgets. Moreover, reports have documented the misuse of millions of dollars in public funds in those programs.

Despite all this, and amid a cost-of-living crisis, President Trump and congressional Republicans want taxpayers to foot the bill for the federal school voucher program, which will worsen income inequality by wasting taxpayer money to subsidize private schools for wealthy families. To make matters worse, private schools under this program will have no public accountability for how they use funds or for student outcomes. Worse still, students who attend private schools may not have full protections under federal civil rights laws and may not receive the services they need to access a free and appropriate public education under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Furthermore, some schools that receive the funds may be permitted to discriminate against both students and staff, including students with disabilities.

To add insult to injury, the Department of the Treasury's recent proposed rule to implement the voucher program prohibits states from adding requirements for scholarship granting organizations (SGOs), the types of schools that may participate, or what constitutes a qualified education expense. As a result, states will not be able to target the voucher program to students most in need; direct funding to public schools to supplement funding for tutoring, afterschool, or other education programming; add academic reporting requirements; or prohibit participating entities—whether SGOs, schools, education vendors, or anyone else—from engaging in

discrimination. Further, Treasury's proposed rule includes a provision that makes any state requirements related to the program subject to federal review. This is a far cry from returning education to the states. While states will have little power to tailor the program to meet their priorities or to maximize support for public schools, SGOs will have full discretion to design their own programs, including which students to serve, what expenses to pay for, and the types of schools eligible. The federal program also likely preempts current state level requirements for existing state voucher programs. In addition, while students may receive vouchers from both a state program and the federal voucher program, it is unclear how that will work.

All of this is taking place against the backdrop of this Administration's systematic and illegal dismantling of the Department of Education; the evisceration of education research and data; and the proposed large cuts to federal investments in education. There should be no ambiguity about where this Administration and the Republican Congress stand on public education.

Public tax dollars should support the public schools that educate approximately 90 percent of children across America and serve every student regardless of income, disability status, religion, sexual orientation, or zip code. At a time when K-12 schools are struggling with aging infrastructure, teacher shortages, and a lack of resources, Congress should be investing in public education—not devising a tax scheme to subsidize school vouchers that undermine public education. We must restore the promise that every student, no matter where they come from, can access a free, quality, public education.