



April 29, 2010

Dear Legislator:

On behalf of the National Taxpayers Union's 14,000 members in Illinois, I urge you to support SB 2494, which will help children in Chicago's worst-performing schools.

Illinois' schools are in critical condition. Between 2000 and 2008 alone, total spending on public elementary and secondary schools grew by nearly 25 percent – AFTER accounting for inflation. The Heritage Foundation estimates that taxpayers shell out \$100,000 to educate a pupil from kindergarten through the 12th grade today. Yet barely more than half of African American and Hispanic students, including those in Chicago, graduate high school. Without a proper education, children lack the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to their communities and compete in the global economy. As a result, we see higher costs imposed on society and ultimately the taxpayers who foot the bill for many remedial efforts

More spending and government control have failed to improve public education; it is time to try something different. SB 2494 would create a pilot program to provide children with vouchers to enroll in private schools that meet state education standards. To be eligible, children would need to satisfy income qualifications and would need to be currently attending any of the academically lowest-performing ten percent of Chicago elementary schools. SB 2494 has already passed the Senate 33-20 and the House's Executive Committee 10-1.

Opponents claim that the pilot program won't work and will cost taxpayers more money. SB 2494 is modeled on successful initiatives adopted in other states that provide children with a pathway to a learning environment tailored to their individual needs. If enacted, SB 2494 will get parents, not government, more involved in their children's education and empower them to become more conscious of their investment. Moreover, the Illinois Policy Institute estimates that the program will create powerful incentives for schools to improve and will produce a surplus of \$37 million.

Our children and taxpayers cannot afford increased spending and more government control to solve the problems facing the education system. A new approach is necessary: one that stresses increased accountability, more choice, and more parental control in education. I urge you to stand up for the thousands of children in Chicago's worst-performing public schools (and for children across the state) by supporting SB 2494.

Sincerely,

John Stephenson
State Government Affairs Manager