

Rural Georgia Republican legislators doom voucher bill

Rural Georgia Republican legislators are protecting their rural public schools. They warded-off lobbying by the Governor and pro-voucher groups, voting down a voucher bill, as indicated in the attached article.

Rural schools are the center—the heartbeat of the community. Rural legislators in Ohio, take note.

Georgia House GOP members break ranks to doom voucher bill

By JEFF AMY

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ATLANTA (AP) — Rural Georgia Republicans defied lobbying from Gov. Brian Kemp and conservative groups on Wednesday to vote down a proposed state voucher plan funding private school tuition and home schooling.

A total of 16 House Republicans voted against the bill, sending it down to an 89-85 defeat, with Democratic opponents literally leaping for joy as the bill's defeat became clear. Only one Democrat voted for the measure.

The vote illustrates how protective many rural conservatives remain of the public school systems that are the heartbeat of their communities. Those feelings endure despite a nationwide GOP wave for what supporters call education savings accounts following the pandemic and amid culture war fights over what children should learn in public schools.

Republican opponents endured an intense lobbying push, as Kemp took to the radio on Monday and then pushed the bill Tuesday at a House Republican lunch. But superintendents and teacher groups were lobbying intensely on the other side. It became clear that Republican leaders lacked the votes last week after the House debated the bill but didn't vote on it. More changes made Wednesday failed to win over a majority.

The House immediately reconsidered the vote after rejecting the bill, meaning it will be alive when lawmakers return in 2024 for the second year of the two-year term.

Opponents said the program would divert needed public school funding and subsidize institutions that discriminate against people who don't share their social and religious views. They also argued that at \$6,500, poor recipients wouldn't get enough to pay private school tuition.

"What makes us think that poor and disadvantaged families are going to be able to take advantage of this?" asked Rep. Mary Frances Williams, a Marietta Democrat. "It's OK if you don't care about that. But don't pretend that it will benefit them and don't pretend that it won't cost a lot of money, and don't pretend that we can afford it."

Supporters argued that vouchers for private school tuition, home schooling supplies, therapy, tutoring or even early college courses for high school students would help those in poorly performing schools.

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The voucher would have only been available for students who attended schools who rated in the lowest 25% of academic performance for two years in a row.

The bill had the key support of House Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones, a Milton Republican who told lawmakers last week that she had never supported a voucher bill before but had changed her mind.

“Trust your constituents if they want this option,” Jones said Wednesday. “Do you know better than what your people want? So if no one wants a voucher, then no problem. Guess what the appropriation will be? Zero.”

Georgia already gives vouchers for special education students in private schools and \$120 million a year in income tax credits for donors to private school scholarship funds.

<https://apnews.com/article/georgia-schools-vouchers-house-education-7ec95696f3d7bcd49ef4dc3eddd5a38b>