



# Fund Georgia's Future

## 2023 FGF Day at the Capitol Advocacy Toolkit

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### Overview

On Thursday, February 16th 2023, the Fund Georgia's Future Coalition will host a day at the Georgia State Capitol. Participants will hear about key pieces of legislation, build their skills to talk to legislators, and more. For those who can't attend, please engage by sharing information on social media and reaching out to your legislators via phone or email.

### Key Pieces of Legislation

#### **SUPPORT:**

HB 3: Support for Students Living in Poverty Act

- Sponsored by Rep. Sandra Scott, this bill would provide categorical grants to support students living in poverty.

Budget appropriations:

- \$27 million for School Counselors

#### **OPPOSE:**

HB 54: Increase the voucher amount by \$80 million a year while providing no additional accountability to discriminatory private schools.

- Sponsored by Rep. John Carson, this bill would increase the annual cap on income tax credits available for donations to student scholarship organizations (SSOs) for them to provide school vouchers for students to attend private schools.
- This legislation increases the cap from the current \$120 million to \$200 million. The cap was raised from \$58 million to \$100 million in 2018 and increased again to \$120 million last year.
- A recent [state audit](#) of the Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit, the program that HB 54 is trying to expand, found that the \$120 million “scholarship” program was vulnerable to fraud and waste due to weak transparency and accountability measures. Changes made in HB 517 last year did little to ensure that Georgia tax payers have a solid return on investment.

## Talking Points

### HB 3 Talking Points

**Bottom line: Opportunity funding would benefit a majority of students across the state of Georgia.**

- Georgia has more children in poverty than [43 other states](#) and Atlanta has the [highest income inequality](#) of any major American city.
  - These students do [measurably worse in school](#) without targeted support.
- Georgia is [one of only six states](#) without specific funding to support students in poverty, this bill would fix that.
  - [Research shows](#) that increased education funding makes a huge difference for students, especially those in low-income communities.
- Schools need to be given resources to meet the unique needs of their students, and that includes recognizing the challenges that poverty creates for learners.
- We know that every school looks different, focus on what it looks like to educate kids living in poverty in your school and share what 1-3 things your school needs to make a stronger learning environment for all kids e.g. smaller class sizes, highly qualified teachers, extra curricular programs, etc.

### HB 54 Talking Points

**Bottom line: Vouchers take money away from the state, needed to maintain and improve public schools.** Vouchers are useless to rural families and those with students whom private schools cannot or will not educate. Their dismal track record with test scores and lack of accountability make HB 54 an \$80 million giveaway to failing private schools while public schools are in desperate need of increased investment.

## Overview

[HB 54](#), a bill that increases the annual cap on income tax credits available for donations to student scholarship organizations (SSOs) for them to provide school vouchers for students to attend private schools, was introduced earlier this year. This legislation increases the cap from \$120 million to \$200 million. The cap was raised from \$58 million to \$100 million in 2018 and increased again to \$120 million last year. Fund Georgia Future opposes mainly for the reasons below.

- This bill diverts critical resources away from the existing public education system, where the majority of students are and will continue to be educated. Vouchers in Georgia have [diverted \\$1.3 billion](#) since 2008.
  - The reduction in funding for public education means less educator training, larger class sizes, and fewer opportunities in school such as music and the arts.
- In practice, HB 54 acts as a coupon for the wealthy to attend private schools. Georgia's Tax-Credit Scholarship program is open to any family, regardless of income. This means millionaires who can easily afford to send their children to private schools can participate in this program.
- Private schools regularly discriminate by income, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. HB 54 does not require private schools to accept all students, or even alert parents that the prospective school openly discriminates.
- Private schools are not held to federal protections for students with disabilities or multilingual learners, and acceptance of this voucher is a relinquishment of those rights for children.
- This voucher program lacks transparency regarding contributors, beneficiaries, and the criteria by which scholarships are awarded, even the size and number of scholarships awarded. Without a mandate to report demographic information of participating students, it is difficult to see whether the program is meeting its stated policy objective of increasing the affordability of private schools for low-income families.
- The voucher disproportionately harms rural families because private schools are scarce in geographically isolated areas. The benefits of this tax credit are essentially null and void for those living in rural communities.
- Research shows that students who use school vouchers have significantly lower academic attainment rates compared to similarly situated students enrolled in the public education system.

## Sample Phone Scripts

**Note:** You can find your GA House Member's contact information [here](#). You can find your GA Senator's information [here](#). Not sure who your representatives are? Find them [here](#).

### HB 3 Script

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from ***(Name of City/Town)***.

*I'm calling to show my support for House Bill 3 and request that you prioritize passing additional funding for students living in poverty.*

*Georgia is one of six states that does not provide additional funding for students living in poverty. Appropriating funds specifically to support our students living in poverty would be an investment in children across the state, and would help districts meet the unique needs that come with serving communities with limited economic resources.*

*I hope you'll prioritize this important measure which would support students across our state.*

*Thank you.*

### **HB 54 Script**

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from **(Name of City/Town)**

I'm calling to let **(Name of Legislator)** know that I do not support HB 54.

This legislation would increase the cap on income tax credits available for donations to student scholarship organizations for them to provide school vouchers for students to attend private schools. I believe this bill would undermine the public education system in Georgia.

This program lacks transparency when it comes to contributors, beneficiaries, scholarship criteria, and even the size and number of scholarships awarded. The schools that participate are also not subject to any accountability when it comes to academic outcomes for students.

Programs like this divert funding away for the state's public school system, where the majority of students are educated. The public school system is also subject to many more rules and regulations with regard to transparency, use of funds, and other criteria than the schools which participate in this program.

I thank you for your time and hope **(Insert Legislator Name)** will support Georgia's public schools and vote against HB 54.

## **Target Legislators**

Name	District	Office	Issue	Contact Info
Chairman Shaw Blackmon (House Ways & Means	HD 146		Tell him you oppose HB 54, and ask him not to schedule	<a href="mailto:shaw.blackmon@house.ga.gov">shaw.blackmon@house .ga.gov</a>

Committee)			this bill for a hearing	(404) 656-5103
Chairman Chris Erwin (House Education Committee)	HD 32		Ask for a hearing <b>with a vote</b> for HB 3	<a href="mailto:chris.erwin@house.ga.gov">chris.erwin@house.ga.gov</a> (404) 656-0188

# Sample Social Media Language

## Hashtags

#GaPol | #EdPol | #FundGAsFuture

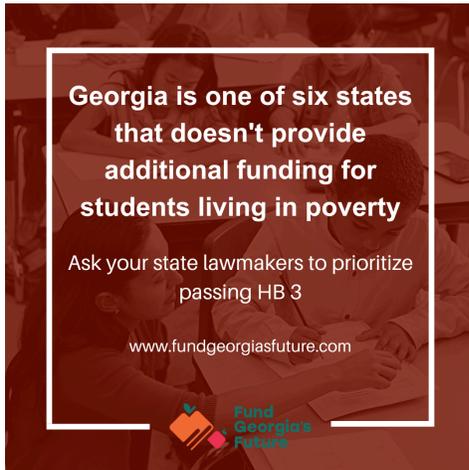
## Twitter

- Georgia is still 1 of only 6 states that doesn't provide additional funding to educate students in poverty. Rep. @SandraGScott76's bill could change that! Tell your lawmakers to pass HB 3! #GaPol #FundGAsFuture

## Facebook/Instagram

- In the 2020 Quality Counts Report from Education Week, Georgia ranked 49th out of all states and DC based on the difference between how low-income students perform on state tests compared to their higher-income peers. Georgia is also one of only six states that does not provide additional funding to educate students who are dealing with the unique challenges of poverty. Rep. Sandra Scott introduced House Bill (HB) 3 for this purpose. Call or email your state legislators and ask them to pass HB 3! #GaPol #EdPol #FundGAsFuture

## Graphic



**Georgia is one of six states  
that doesn't provide  
additional funding for  
students living in poverty**

Ask your state lawmakers to prioritize  
passing HB 3

[www.fundgeorgiasfuture.com](http://www.fundgeorgiasfuture.com)

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