



Rural GA Republicans Split on Private School Voucher Bill

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Rural Georgia lawmakers divided the delegation last week as they took up a measure that would redirect state tax dollar vouchers for private schools.

Senate Bill 173 proposes the creation of a 'scholarship' account to allow parents to direct the average amount of \$5,500 in state money that currently goes to public schools on a per student basis to a private school instead. It would also allow the flexibility of using the money for "other educational costs" like textbooks or tutoring as well.

The idea has long been held by Republicans as a 'free market approach' to education, supported by the Georgia Center for Opportunity and Americans for Prosperity, but public school supporters, the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, and similar organizations have said it would leave public schools with limited funds and create a divide amongst student types. Democrats argue the idea is a subsidy for private school attendees while conservatives say their tax allocation should 'go with the child.'

Senator Greg Dolezal said of the scholarships during debate last week:

"They allow the state funding to follow the child into a variety of optional educational experiences, such as homeschooling, hybrid schooling, online schooling, virtual schooling, private schooling, home tutoring, et cetera," while Senator John Albers said, *"The state has no money,"* he said. *"They have the people's money, which they forcibly take from them through taxes. So, the same people's money who may want to have a different option for their child...I would hope we would never stand in front of the student and the people who fund that."* Both are metro area Republicans.

Margaret Ciccarelli, director of legislative affairs for the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), [said in an interview with WABE](#) that public schools can't afford to lose that much money.

"Many of our public schools are still struggling," Ciccarelli said to WABE on the redirect of funds. "Transportation costs, particularly in rural Georgia, are a heavy lift."

House Bill 301, a similar bill proposed in the House but didn't move, had a fiscal note attached which stated program would require \$48 million of tax dollars in its first year, rising to a maximum of about \$543 million in a decade as more students participate. This number was not pure *cost* of implementing the program, but also included the 'diversion' of dollars that would have gone to public schools but instead would go to private schools.

When it came time to vote, rural Republicans specifically split the vote on the issue.

RURAL GA REPUBLICAN YES VOTES:

Ginn, Frank (Danielsville)
Gooch, Steve (Dahlonega)
Stone, Jesse (Waynesboro)
Tillery, Blake (Vidalia)
Walker, Larry (Toccoa)

RURAL GA REPUBLICAN NO VOTES:

Black, Ellis (Valdosta)
Burke, Dean (Bainbridge)
Harper, Tyler (Ocilla)
Hill, Jack (Reidsville)
Kirk, Greg (Americus)
Miller, Butch (Gainesville) – Senate President Pro Tem

Republican Senator Lindsey Tippins, who previously served as the Senate Education Chair, voted NO as well. Senators Brandon Beach, Mike Dugan, and Jeff Mullis – all Republicans – did not vote and were marked ‘excused.’

Democrats unanimously opposed the bill and the collective opposition [led the bill to its failure](#).

Georgia has a program through student scholarship organizations that allows Georgians to donate to 501(c)3 organizations and receive a tax credit against their state income tax. Democrats have largely opposed this program as well.

The bill did not come back up for reconsideration on Crossover Day, but could still pass if the language is amended into another bill.

[You can read the bill here](#).

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