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HOUSE BILL PCB EEC 21-01 MAKING MAJOR CHANGES IN DISABILITY SCHOLARSHIPS

The House Education and Employment Committee has passed through committee PCB EEC 21-01 which makes major changes to the disability scholarships. It has some similarities to Senate Bill 48 but does not mirror it completely.

As James Herzog, Director of Legislative Services for Florida Association of Academic Nonpublic Schools, reports "The House proposal in some ways is a more modest school choice expansion than the Senate bill. In particular, the House would convert only the McKay scholarship into education savings accounts, remove the prior public attendance requirement and consolidate McKay and Gardiner under the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program."

Unlike the Senate, which proposed making all of the scholarship programs Education Savings Plans, only the disability scholarships would be ESA's. "Ours is more voucher-driven," Representative Fine, the sponsor of the bill, says. "If it is a voucher, it's easier to monitor what spending is going on, you take it, you give it to a school and off you go to the school."

The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools has noted some of the positive aspects of the bill. This bill has given the McKay Scholarship a year to transform from a tuition voucher to an Educational Savings Plan. This will allow parents and schools to understand what the difference will be and will allow the SFO to develop a strong infrastructure to accommodate the 30,000 students presently on the McKay Scholarship.

The cap on students with disabilities is very different than the Senate Bill cap and it will allow for sustainable growth for the program.

Concerns:

The Coalition is still very concerned about the lowering of the scholarship for students presently at the 253 level. 253 students encompass 4,000 McKay students. They are students who have more severe disabilities and who will, most likely, need to remain in school until they are 22. They require more intensive services in order to develop

employability skills. They tend to be in schools that are designed to meet their needs; schools which do not take students at the 251 or 252 levels. Dropping their scholarships \$1500 - \$2000 will be crushing to parents and schools who are attempting to provide the services the students need to develop these crucial skills for their future.

The Coalition has asked that the funding formula be reviewed and that students at the 253 level not have their funding levels lowered.

Call your representative (www.myfloridahouse.gov has the list) **and ask him/her to support this change.)**

We will continue to work with the House and Senate as this bill moves through the committees.

*Link to 13-page Staff Analysis dated Mar. 24, 2021: https://static-s3.lobbytools.com/bills/2021/pdf/analysis_7045_03-24-21_post_1989.pdf.

Prepared by The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools which is an organization of non-public schools that accepts students receiving funding through the McKay Scholarship program and individuals who are committed to keeping the McKay Scholarship Program a viable choice for parents of students with disabilities in Florida. The Coalition's mission is to assimilate and disseminate information about the McKay Scholarship program from sources such as the Department of Education (DOE), the legislature, schools, parents, and the community. The Coalition also advocates for McKay Scholarship schools and students with disabilities to ensure viability of this program.

