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February 28, 2018

To: Rep. Julie Van Orden, Chairman
Rep. Patrick McDonald, Vice Chairman
Members of the House Education Committee

FROM: Julie Custer, Co-President
AAUW Idaho

Re: Testimony Opposed to H590

Madam Chairman and Committee Members,

My name is Julie Custer and I'm co-president of the American Association of University Women of Idaho (AAUW-Idaho speaking to you today in opposition to House Bill 590.

AAUW is a nationwide organization that was founded in 1881 by 17 college-educated women who wanted to make it easier for women to get a college degree. AAUW recognizes the fundamental right to education and the reciprocal benefits of inclusive public education to a democratic society. We believe that high-quality education is the key to economic prosperity and gender equality. We advocate for adequate and equitable funding for quality public education for all students and oppose the use of public funds for nonpublic elementary and secondary education.

Because of their open and nondiscriminatory acceptance of all students, our nation's public schools are a unifying factor among the diverse range of American students. Yet funding for our public schools is continually threatened and Idaho ranks 49th out of the 50 states in per-pupil spending.

Although this is a tightly-written bill, it seems evident that this program is laying the groundwork for the creation of a full-blown voucher system, whereby more public funds would be diverted to unaccountable private schools. AAUW Idaho is not the only organization that has this view. A private school in north Idaho posted a story on its website on February 15 that had the headline "*Idaho State moves closer to "School Vouchers"*".



School vouchers would be devastating to the Idaho public school system, particularly in our rural areas where there aren't even private school options. Supporters of this bill say eligible children in these communities could access online courses. This assumes that children have access to the internet and that the internet availability is reliable.

House Bill 590 is the first step toward undermining our public schools and sending money to private or parochial schools that do not improve academic achievement or adhere to students' civil rights. Given the severe education budget crisis we see at the local, state and federal levels, it is both impractical and unwise to gamble limited funds on a new program that would only benefit a few students. To launch this new system of collecting funds and distributing them through these scholarships, public moneys in the form of some personnel salaries would have to be expended. Our state should use its limited funds to make public schools stronger by supporting programs that have been shown to improve student outcomes, such as teacher training, smaller class sizes, expanded support services, and improved facilities.

House Bill 590 is bad for Idaho school children on its face and opens the door for even more harmful policies in the future. AAUW Idaho respectfully requests that you vote "No" on House Bill 590. Thank you.