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Chairman Sturla and members of the Democratic Policy Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today on this important matter of school choice.

My name is Dr. John Storey, I am the Northeast Regional Director for the Association of Christian Schools International. I have been an educator for over 30 years as a teacher, head of school and as a consultant to schools for ACSI. I am also an adjunct professor for three universities, the Founder of the Pennsylvania chapter of the Council for American Private Education, and serve as a Commissioner for the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges.

Seated with me today are Dr. Kathy Keafer, head of Johnstown Christian School and a specialist in working with students with learning challenges. Mr. Phil Puleo is the head of Harrisburg Christian School and represents a growing school by every measure. Both Johnstown Christian School and Harrisburg Christian School are accredited with the Association of Christian Schools International, The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and Johnstown Christian is accredited by the National Institute for Learning Development.

My mission in my career is to do everything possible to improve the quality of education for students. I have chosen to do this within the private school community, mainly in Christian schools, although I am deeply concerned about quality education for all young people.

School choice already exists. I chose to send my children to a private school, despite the fact that I pay taxes to the public school system. Others choose to home school their children. Yet other families choose to send their children to public schools. There are parents who are not afforded these choices because of financial and work considerations.

School choice at the post-secondary level has existed since the 1940s. The GI Bill has provided money to people serving in the military to attend the private or public college or university of their choice. Other grants, such as PHEA, enable students to choose the school at which they will receive their education. We have built a world-class system of higher education on this model.

School choice within public education has always existed. Most parents, when choosing where to live, take into account the quality of the public school system when purchasing or renting a home. It is parents who cannot afford housing in some school districts who are left without a choice. This is the beauty of Senate Bill 1 -- It enables poor families to have a choice—most for the first time.

The most important rationale for school choice is that parents are the ones best able to know which school will best educate their child. One of the core values of our society is our respect and support of

the family. Our parents choose the doctor their child goes to, they choose the church their children will attend, they choose the food their children will eat, and the list goes on. However, because of the method of funding education, the majority of parents are left without a choice of where their children will attend school.

Choice is not about giving up on the public schools or the many fine individuals working within them; there is no reason that government schools could not flourish under choice. Indeed, by providing autonomy – the key to success in almost any human endeavor—as well as an unequivocal mandate to please customers, choice could be the best thing that ever happened to the good teachers and principals in public schools.

A study of our free enterprise system shows us that product quality is enhanced when competition exists. Those products having little value, in low demand, or of inferior quality do not remain very long in a market economy. It is believed by many, and research supports the fact that competition will improve the educational system in this country. America spends more money, per pupil, on education than almost every other country and yet our testing indicates that we are low on the outcome ladder. A recent review of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) draws the following conclusion:

“Clearly, how much a state spends per pupil matters far less than how that state spends that money on education services. Unfortunately, these spending methods probably aren’t standardized either. Hence, good outcomes are far more expensive in New Jersey or Massachusetts than they are in Idaho or South Dakota. But one conclusion should stand out above all others – proficiency levels in even the most impressive states never break 60 percent. In fact, national averages on all four tests hover in the mid-30 percent range. That means that far more than half of the nation’s 4th and 8th graders are still scoring below proficient on both math and reading. Given that finding, it seems like every state needs to start rethinking how they spend their education dollars.” (New America Foundation, Ed Money Watch)

I applaud a public school district in Colorado which this week approved a school choice initiative. The following is a quote from the Denver Post on Monday, April 4, 2011:

“After months of study, roiling controversy and emotional debate, the Douglas County school board Tuesday night unanimously approved a groundbreaking plan to help pay tuition for hundreds of students to attend private schools.

The pilot program, which will be reviewed each year, would make up to 500 students eligible to receive \$4,575 to attend a private school in the 2011-12 school year.

“This is an important night for Douglas County,” said board president John Carson. “This is the finest school district in the state of Colorado, and I believe the action we take tonight will make it even better.”

The district estimates it would save about \$3 million by having 500 fewer students. The district would pay about \$2.29 million in voucher scholarships, but when CSAP and other expenses are deducted, the district might actually net \$402,500.” This is from a public school board. I would love to see this type of objectivity, pragmatism, and progressivism in Pennsylvania!

There is so much misinformation out there regarding school choice and particularly Senate Bill 1. A recent television commercial, funded by Moveon.org is essentially trying to convince Commonwealth citizens that this is a one billion dollar entitlement which will raise property taxes. The only accurate piece of the propaganda is that it correctly indicates that it is Senate Bill 1.

Another piece of misinformation is that private schools provide an inferior quality of education or that there are no measures to insure accountability. I would suggest that government as the ultimate measure of accountability is a flawed concept. Market forces provide much better quality control. If parents pull their children from our schools we cease to exist. Therefore, private school accountability is inherently geared to providing a high quality of education.

The Association of Christian Schools International exists for the purposes of “enabling Christian educators and schools to prepare students for life.” We do this by assisting schools to provide a better quality education. Our premiere service is school accreditation. Those schools accredited with ACSI can be dually accredited with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools or their respective regional accrediting body if they choose to. These dual agreements exist because the accrediting bodies have recognized ACSI standards of accreditation to be substantively equivalent to their own. Interestingly accreditation is a growing trend in private education and a diminishing trend among public schools. In these schools, teachers are degreed (many with advanced degrees) and certified and schools report annually on their progress on working on quality indicators.

ACSI has 200 member schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, educating 33,000 students. One of the pieces of misinformation is that private schools only enroll the best and brightest students. Our data indicates that the students enrolled in our schools reflect the demographic of the area they live in, including academic achievement at the time of admission. Many of our schools take in students with learning disabilities and IEP’s. My daughter was diagnosed with learning disabilities and because of a program provided through the National Institute for Learning Development at our local private Christian school will graduate from college in May with honors and has been accepted into graduate school.

ACSI has a national testing program, currently using the Stanford Achievement test. Over 70% of our member schools use this program, the majority of others use another nationally normed test of their choosing. The results of these tests indicate that our schools are consistently two years ahead of their peers in every major educational discipline and the average for each grade level is in the 75th percentile for all students.

In addition, private schools **comply with a long list of state regulations:**

- Compulsory attendance
- Minimum days and hours of instruction
- Minimum course requirements
- Graduation requirements
- Health and safety regulations such as fire, cleanliness, building construction, playground safety, lighting, heating, food safety, and emergency response, for example.
- Staff background check requirements

97.5% of students graduate from private high schools. Of those graduates, **over 90%** go on to attend either a two or four-year institute of higher learning.

I recently visited Philadelphia Mennonite High School. This is a fully accredited high school serving poor minority students in the City of Philadelphia. This school has experienced 100% of their graduates being accepted into college and many to Ivy League schools.

The bottom line is, private schools can only stay open if parents choose to send their child to these schools. Therefore, **accountability to our parents and communities is and will continue to be a top priority.** We are not however opposed to reasonable modes of accountability which will not impinge upon the mission of our private schools.

The racial and ethnic composition of students enrolled in public schools was 58 percent non-Hispanic White, 20 percent Hispanic (regardless of race), 16 percent non-Hispanic Black, 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native. Among private schools, the racial and ethnic composition was 74 percent non-Hispanic White, 10 percent non-Hispanic Black, 9 percent Hispanic (regardless of race), 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native (table 3).

Taken from this report the 07 – 08 school year: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009321.pdf>

It is important to couple these numbers with the economic viability for minority children to attend private schools:

Those in poverty included 1 in 10 White, non-Hispanic children (11 percent), more than 1 in 3 Black children (35 percent), and nearly 1 in 3 Hispanic children (31 percent).⁷

Taken from this report: http://www.childstats.gov/pdf/ac2010/ac_10.pdf

Black and Brown children are three times more likely to be poor than White children. **Therefore, it is logical to conclude that there will be a higher percentage of White children in private schools (including faith-based ones) compared to Black and Brown children. Interesting to note, however, is that while the poverty rate for Black and Brown children is three times higher than White children, their enrollment in faith-based schools is not three times less than that of White children.** This legislation has the capability to eliminate the inequity that currently exists.

In conclusion, the Association of Christian Schools International supports Senate Bill 1 and will work tirelessly to ensure that the quality of education in our schools exceeds all reasonable qualitative standards. We believe that this bill will improve the plight of financially distressed families and in turn improve the quality of education in the public schools impacted by this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony with you today and I urge each of you to give a look to Senate Bill 1 and the corresponding House legislation beyond the politics and do what is right for the students in our Commonwealth schools.

It would be our privilege to answer any questions you may have.