

Below is testimony by TFT Secretary-Treasurer John O'Sullivan to the Senate Education Committee delivered on Tuesday, March 27, 2007, regarding Senate Bill 1,000.

My name is John O'Sullivan and I serve as the Secretary-Treasurer of the 57,000 member Texas Federation of Teachers. I am here today to speak in opposition to passage of Senate Bill 1,000.

The Texas Federation of Teachers has a long history of opposition to private school vouchers, tax credits or a variety of other schemes proposed to transfer taxpayer dollars to fund private school education. Senate Bill 1,000 is a private school voucher bill and the Texas Federation of Teachers **will** report to our members how their senators and representatives vote on this bill at every stage of the legislative process. Furthermore, the Texas Federation of Teachers is proud to be a part of the more than one million members of the Texas Coalition for Public Schools in their opposition to Senate Bill 1,000.

While opposed to Senate Bill 1000 Senator Shapiro, we share with you a deep concern for the welfare of students with autism and other Texas students in special education programs. Our concern expresses itself in support for a variety of bills most of which could and should be heard by this Committee. The members of the Texas Federation of Teachers, both teachers and paraprofessionals, tell us that they want more and better training in how best to serve special education students, especially students with autism spectrum disorders. Our members are disappointed to learn that the Texas Education Agency has not done what it could to obtain an available \$10 million dollar State Improvement Grant federal funding for this needed training. We believe that these bills represent the approach best suited to meet the needs of students with autism.

In our view, the problem with Senate Bill 1000 is that it gives the frame (vouchers) a higher priority than the big picture--the educational and medical services needed by students with autism. There is no reason to think--given the same funding--that private or charter schools can educate students with autism any better than private or charter schools have dealt with non-autistic children. No one should have to remind us that there is no significant body of evidence that suggest that these private or quasi-private schools have done even as well as our regular public schools in educating their largely hand-picked student populations.

And, regarding this legislation, there are just too many unanswered questions. One question of particular concern to our members is exactly what programs and services would the **regular public school** continue to have responsibility to provide. Does this yet to be defined public school responsibility extend to both before and after the state issues a voucher to the parents of a student with autism? Do our members continue to provide the initial evaluation of these students, participate in an ARD, develop the IEP, and perhaps even find themselves obligated to continue to deliver some services to students though the students are now enrolled in a private school. Can the student with autism return to the public school? When? Who bears the cost of mid-stream reevaluations, ARD's, IEP's, and staff. And, what will be the role of the federal government in sharing the

costs for these private school vouchers? Will federal dollars represent a part of the local school districts obligation to fund these private school vouchers or will school districts be on their own?

At the very least, we recommend that Senate Bill 1000 be held in committee until these questions and issues are addressed.