

Testimony Before the Texas Senate Education Committee in  
Support of School Choice and an Urban Pilot School Choice  
Program

By Bishop Gene A. Moore Sr.

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Texas Capitol Extension, First Floor  
Room E1.028  
School Choice Bill, SB1506  
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Open Air Rotunda  
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Good Morning

Thank you Senator Shapiro for convening these important hearings

My name is Gene A. Moore Sr. I am the senior pastor of St Agnes Baptist Church in Houston, which has a membership of 14,000.

Our ministry just celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary two weeks ago.

I am also here representing the *Texas Black Clergy Network*.

I have served as a *Trustee of the Houston Community College System* and was appointed by Governor Bush as a *Trustee on the Board of Regents of Texas Southern University*. Education is very important to me.

You have heard others talk about the high dropout rate among minority students here in Texas. It is now around 50% in certain cities like Houston, Dallas, Ft. Worth and San Antonio.

What I want to talk to you about is this: These students are not just dropping out, they are giving up.

Last week in Houston, we were glued to our TV sets as we watched the news about the horrific murder of a 19 year-old Texas A&M student. This

young woman was bright, on scholarship and was majoring in engineering. Yet, she was struck down at the beginning of her young adult life.

Dr. Paige has often talked about the growing disparity of male to female students on college campuses, especially among African American students. This growing disparity is causing our girls to make irrational decisions about who they should date.

Without convicting the accused, I do want to say this: He was much older than her and he was not a college student. Our girls are being forced to make these kinds of decisions just to find a mate. We have to reverse this behavior.

Because even when good students like her do graduate from high school and go on to college, the number of college-bound male students is dropping dramatically and that it is having adverse effect on our entire community in terms of our social development. We cannot afford this kind of setback.

You see, it has been only a few hundred years ago that we were brought to these shores as unwilling labor for economic means. It has been less than 150 years since we earned our freedom from slavery.

African American citizens in Texas and across the nation have used education as a tool to uplift themselves.

For 5 out of every 10 of our high school freshmen to drop out of high school before they reach graduation is an unacceptable break in our education tradition and we pastors can no longer stand by and watch it happen.

So we are here, bringing our petitions before you, our elected representatives. We hope you hear our grievances. We need more choices in education in order to curb this dropout rate.

Since 1981, my ministry has offered the parents of Harris County an alternative to their public neighborhood school if that school was under performing.

Each year, the waiting list is long and we are never able to accommodate all who would want to put their child in our school.

Low-income parents are at a severe disadvantage because while they may attend our church, many live miles away and simply cannot get their child to our school. The answer in more neighborhood school choices

I believe with the passage of this school choice bill, more churches and pastors will be encouraged to develop neighborhood schools to provide more choices to low-income parents.

Finally, I want to say this. There are a lot of teachers in my congregation. I am a supporter of public education. The bill, as I read it, will not damage the public school system in any way. In fact, it will ease the burden on many public schools by allowing students with certain special needs to transfer to a special school designed to attend to those needs.

And, ~~the~~ only instructional dollars will transfer with the students, leaving funding for facilities and maintenance unchanged at the student's old school.

Senators, I do not believe that any one program will solve our education dropout crisis. However, I am ready to support a pilot program because we cannot continue to sit back and allow our kids to dropout, then give up, and only to then wipe out someone who trying to make something of him or herself. I know you share these same views.

So once again, Senator Shapiro and all of the members of the *Senate Education Committee*, I urge you to vote **yes** on the **Urban School Choice Pilot Program** and send the bill to the Senate floor for a full debate.

I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

Gene A Moore, Sr.