



Testimony for the Senate Budget and Tax Committee

February 9, 2022

SB 401 - Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships for Nonpublic School Students

UNFAVORABLE

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The ACLU of Maryland has long opposed taxpayer subsidies for private and religious schools in the many and increasing forms that they have taken in our state – vouchers, subsidies for textbooks and technology, and subsidies to maintain and improve private school buildings. The ACLU of Maryland opposes SB 401 proposed expansion of the BOOST program up to a total of \$16 million after the fiscal year 2027.

The vast majority of the schools that receive subsidies through the BOOST programs are religious schools, which improperly entangle public taxpayer dollars with religious teachings. Undeniable evidence has surfaced to expose the reality that some BOOST-funded schools are operating with discriminatory practices. There remain serious transparency concerns about what government dollars support religious teachings and whether those policies and practices align with the firm, inclusive anti-discrimination standards that govern our public schools.

To shift funds away from public schools, which educate the vast majority of students in our state, no matter who they are is unacceptable. This is particularly true when the fiscal year 2023 budget proposal omits a mandated appropriation of \$125.5 million to Baltimore City and Prince George's County public schools. Private and religious schools also do not have to meet the same non-discrimination standards as public schools. And there are currently no clear, consistent curriculum and testing requirements that would ensure that private and religious schools will be held to the same standard as public schools in exchange for state subsidies.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges an unfavorable report on SB 401.

