

## **Urban Schools Scholarship Act**

My brother Knights,

A bill titled the 'Urban Schools Scholarship Act' is beginning to make its way through the New Jersey State Assembly (bill A-1003) along with a sister bill in the New Jersey Senate (bill S-140). These two bills are a result of your New Jersey State Council's affiliation with the New Jersey School Choice Alliance. You may remember a few years ago we sponsored a school choice petition drive, which was held at almost every parish in the state. Since that time we have aligned ourselves with the School Choice Alliance to work to make school choice an issue within the state. Through our collaborative efforts, as well as those of the voting public this past November, we are finally reaching a point wherein an acceptable bill is gathering support from our state legislators and may be released from committee for debate in the Assembly and Senate. The details of the bill can be found on the next page. The highlights are:

- 5-year pilot program for students residing in Camden, Elizabeth, Lakewood, Orange, Paterson and Trenton
- Student's family must earn less than \$51,000.00 annually for a family of 4
- Scholarships estimated at \$6,000.00 for each eligible student in grades K-8
- Scholarships estimated at \$9,000.00 for each eligible student in grades 9-12
- Usage in participating out-of-district public or in-district or out-of-district non-public schools
- Scholarships funded entirely by 100% tax credit for contributions made on New Jersey Corporate Business Tax filings.

Notice that the bill does *not* require the student to attend a Catholic, parochial school. This is because its intent is to assist parents of all faiths in finding and funding a quality education for their children. The Black Minister's Council of New Jersey, the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, the Lakewood Jewish Community Vaad, the New Jersey Association of Public and Subsidized Housing Residents as well as the New Jersey Network of Catholic School Families and the New Jersey State Council Knights of Columbus endorse this legislation.

Please read the following summary of the bills and then contact your state senator and assemblymen urging them to sign on in support of them. If you are represented by one of the legislators who are named as sponsors please call them and thank them for their support. If you would like to learn more about the School Choice Alliance please visit their website, <http://schoolchoicealliance.org/> Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need more information.

Thank you,  
Jim Stoever, FDD  
Special Programs Director  
NJ State Council, Knights of Columbus

**Urban Schools Scholarship Act**  
**A-1003/S-140**

**Description**

Under a 5-year pilot program, eligible low-income children residing in **Camden, Elizabeth, Lakewood, Newark, Orange, Paterson and Trenton** would receive scholarships to attend participating public or non-public schools.

<b>Assembly Sponsors (Introduced 1-08-08, referred to Assembly Education Committee)</b> (D-5) Nilsa Cruz-Perez, Camden (R-10) David Wolfe, Brick (R-12) Declan O'Scanlon, Red Bank (R-30) Joseph Malone, Bordentown	<b>Senate Prime Sponsor (Introduced 1-08-08, referred to Senate Education Committee)</b> (D-20) Raymond Lesniak, Union
---	---

**Program features**

- Scholarships estimated \$6,000 for each eligible student in grades K-8 (based on 40% of average Pilot District's comparative cost), \$9,000 for grades 9-12 (based on 59% of Pilot District's comparative cost).
- For use at any participating out-of-district public school or in-district or out-of-district non-public school.
- Modeled on the successful Pennsylvania Educational Improvement Tax Credit program (25,000 students in 62 of 67 Counties, over 2,200 corporations participate, sixth year of implementation, Pa. has increased the funding each year), adjusted for NJ pilot.
  - Qualifications for children to receive scholarship:
    - Family earns less than 2.5 times the current Federal Poverty Level, e.g. \$51,000 for family of 4.
    - Must live in Camden, Elizabeth, Lakewood, Newark, Orange, Paterson or Trenton
    - May attend any participating public or non public school in N.J. (grades K-12).
  - Program funded by 100% tax credit for contributions on NJ Corporate Business Tax filings. Funds allocated to Scholarship Organizations (SO) to be distributed to participating schools.
  - Total credit/contributions limited to \$24 million in year 1, \$48 million in year 2, \$72 million in year 3, \$96 million in year 4, and \$120 million in year 5. Allocations to pilot districts based on percent of resident students to total of resident students in all pilots districts.
- No more than 25% scholarships allocated to existing non-public students, therefore, at least 75 % awarded to public school students.
- Participating Public or Non-Public School Requirements
  - Scholarship must be accepted as payment in full for tuition and any other costs of attendance.
  - All scholarship eligible children who apply are accepted. If more students apply than seats available, a lottery is held. Siblings of enrolled students get preference.
  - Non-public schools participating shall not discriminate on the basis of: intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a handicapped person, or proficiency in the English language.
  - Must test scholarship students aligned with NJ core curriculum content standards.
- Scholarship Organizations (SO) Requirements
  - Must be 501(c) 3 tax exempt organization
  - SO must distribute no less than 95% of tax credit contributions as scholarships
  - One SO per county chosen by Scholarship Fund Board
- Reporting
  - Annual reports to parents by SO's
  - After 4<sup>th</sup> year, independent study reports academic achievement, savings to NJ taxpayers, enrollment patterns, and parental satisfaction.
- Reduces class size in pilot districts' public schools, reduces the need to build new public schools in pilot districts, and, average scholarship costs are one third the per pupil costs of pilot districts' public schools.

**Contacts:**

Nilsa Cruz-Perez, Assembly Primary Sponsor: 856-541-1251

Raymond Lesniak, Senate Primary Sponsor: 908-624-0880

**Legislation endorsed by:**

Rev. Reginald Jackson, Exec. Dir., Black Minister's Council of NJ: 201-341-9865 or cell 201-341-9865

Martin Perez, Pres., Latino Leadership Alliance of NJ: 732-214-1166

Rev. Miguel Rivera, Pres. NJ Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders: 201-393-9788

Dana Rone, Educational Chairperson, Newark City Council Member: cell 973-393-2566

Rebecca Nieves Huffman, Pres., Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options: 202-625-6766  
Rabbi Moshe Zev Weisberg, President, The Lakewood Jewish Community Vaad: 732-370-1631  
Howard Fuller, Chairman, Black Alliance for Educational Options: 202-544-9870  
John Galandak, President, Commerce and Industry Assoc. of NJ: 201-368-2100  
Mary McElroy, Director, NJ Network of Catholic School Families, Newark Archdiocese: 973-467-9396  
George Corwell, Associate Director for Education, NJ Catholic Conference: 609-989-1120 ext 16  
Kim Chorba, Director, NJ Network of Catholic School Families, Dioceses of Paterson and Metuchen: 973-907-7329  
Usha Rosidivito, Director, NJ Network of Catholic School Families, Dioceses of Camden and Trenton: 609-406-7400 ext 5550  
Mary Rone, Pres. NJ Association of Public and Subsidized Housing Residents: 973-824-2504  
Daniel Jara, Pres. Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce: 201-487-4477  
Luis Diaz, Pres. Hispanic Advocacy Association (USHAA): 908-448-1162  
Christopher Emigholz, Director of Education and Work Force Development, NJBIA: 609-393-7707  
Batya Jacob, Associate Director, NJ Association of Jewish Day Schools: 551-404-4447  
Sondra R. Clark, President, Black United Fund Health and Human Services: 908-561-0123

**NJ SCHOOL CHOICE ALLIANCE – 171 CLIFTON AVE., NEWARK, NJ 07102 : 973-497-4259**