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I am representing parents and individuals who want to choose the best education for their children by implementing a voucher system for Montana's schools. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is constitutional to use public funding for private schools, and the federal "No Child Left Behind Act" has put new emphasis on choice within the public school system.

School vouchers, sometimes referred to as scholarships, redirect the flow of education funding, channeling it directly to individual families rather than to school districts. This allows families to select the public or private schools of their choice and have all or part of the tuition paid. Parental choice and competition between public and private schools will improve education for all children.

The Montana Voucher System can be funded and administered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. Vouchers for low-income families reduce the educational gap between rich and poor that exists in public schools. Because these programs are compensatory in nature, they award vouchers only to poor children, thereby increasing the range of educational choices open to low-income families, and reducing the education gap.

A mounting body of evidence also shows that private schools help to reduce the socio-economic achievement gap, and help to increase the level of integration between racial and socio-economic groups within schools. A recent article, Fifth Year Report: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program? by John F. Witte, Troy D. Sterr and Christopher A. Thorn states that the Milwaukee publicly-run voucher program is very popular. Parents are not only far more satisfied with their freely chosen private schools than they were with their former public schools, they participate more actively in their children's education now that they've made the move. Lack of vouchers means that poor children will continue to have fewer options than they might otherwise. I will support legislation that implements a voucher system for all Montana schools to allow parents that their children to choose which school they can attend to get the best education possible.

I urge this body to support a Montana voucher system. Thank you. This document is in compliance with the Montana YMCA Youth Legislature Lobbyist Disclosure Policy.