

American Federation for Children: Joint Finance Committee approves extensive expansion of Special Needs Scholarship Program

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Today, the Joint Finance Committee approved a major expansion of Wisconsin's Special Needs Scholarship Program that eliminates previous discriminatory eligibility requirements and provides additional financial resources to educate high cost special needs students in both public and private schools.

"The vote today is a huge win for parents and schools across the state," said Justin Moralez of the American Federation for Children. "We believe that it is critically important that parents of special needs students have access to high quality educational options, both public and private, and that students are equitably funded.

Presently, the only students eligible for the Special Needs Scholarship Program (SNSP) for private schools are those students who have been denied the opportunity to attend a public school outside the district in which they reside. Now, special needs student in public and private schools will be eligible for SNSP.

In addition, the Committee agreed to increase funding for high cost special needs students who are attending a public school outside their district through open enrollment or a private school under the Special Needs Scholarship Program. Previously, these students received \$12,000 in funding despite the fact that the cost of educating them might be much higher. Today, the Committee established a procedure which allows schools educating high cost special needs students to seek additional funds.

"We are especially grateful for the leadership of longtime special needs scholarship champion state Senator Leah Vukmir and the advocacy of Speaker Robin Vos for fairer funding", said Moralez.

AFC encourages both the Assembly and Senate to approve the budget with these provisions.