

Baptists testify against school voucher proposals

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AUSTIN—Two Baptist pastors and the director of the [Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission](#) testified before the state’s Senate Committee on Education against bills they maintained would divert public funds to private faith-based schools.



“We oppose state funding to teach religious views,” Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission Director Gus Reyes told the Texas Senate Committee on Education. (Photo: <http://www.legetv.org>) Kyle Henderson from [First Baptist Church in Athens](#), Bobby Broyles from [First Baptist Church in Ballinger](#) and CLC Director Gus Reyes spoke in opposition to three bills advancing what proponents call “taxpayer savings grants” or “school choice.”

Henderson took issue with the tone of the hearings, as well as the proposed bills.

“I am stunned by the disdain expressed toward public school teachers in this room,” he told the committee. Several state senators spoke of “failed public schools,” and one described the public schools as “a monstrosity.”

Henderson identified himself as both a financial supporter of the private Christian school affiliated with his congregation and as a volunteer in public schools.

“Every school should compete on its own merits,” and private schools should appeal for support within their own constituencies, not depend on public funds, Henderson asserted.

Public funds should not be diverted for faith-based schools

Both private faith-based schools and public schools have their place, he insisted, but public funds should not be diverted to faith-based schools.

“Both can survive. We don’t need to pit them against each other,” he said.

Taxpayer funds should not be directed to religious schools, Broyles agreed.

“Caesar does not need to be supporting God. God can do that just fine on his own,” he said.

Broyles, president of [Pastors for Texas Children](#), urged lawmakers to provide more funding for public education rather than channel funds to private religious schools.

Private schools that accept voucher funds should be accountable to the commissioner of the Texas Education Agency, Reyes said. But that would make faith-based schools accountable to the state rather than church leaders—a threat to their autonomy and religious mission, he asserted.

“We oppose state funding to teach religious views—even our own,” Reyes said.

Furthermore, the proposed voucher plan “doesn’t help the children in greatest need,” he added. Voucher programs harm “the least of these” because they divert dollars away from the public schools that educate 90 percent of school children, he said.

Nine hours of testimony

Supporters of the voucher programs who spoke during more than nine hours of testimony included former U.S. Senator Phil Gramm, San Antonio multi-millionaire James Leininger and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick.

“Giving a handful of students an opportunity for a better school in situations where they don’t have a choice is not going to impact public education,” Patrick asserted.

Some opponents of the proposed voucher plans insisted they lack accountability.

“There is no required curriculum, little or no required assessment, and no required reporting or accountability for academic outcomes,” said David Anthony, a former school superintendent who spoke on behalf of [Raise Your Hand Texas](#).

The committee left the bills pending at the conclusion of the hearing.