

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 11, 2024

**NM HOUSE REPUBLICANS VOW TO PROPEL EDUCATION OUT OF LAST PLACE, PROPOSE SCHOOL CHOICE BILL**

New Mexico House Republicans, under the leadership of Representative Ryan Lane (R-Aztec), announced a groundbreaking initiative for a scholarship tax credit aimed at improving the state's education standing and providing low-income families the ability to send their children to private schools. New Mexico, currently ranked last in the U.S. for education, faces a vital need for transformative and innovative policy measures. In response, Republican legislators have proposed far-reaching legislation that empowers families and incentivizes educational improvements through a tax credit program.

Under the proposed legislation, businesses and individual taxpayers can contribute to school tuition organizations that provide scholarships to low-income students who choose to attend private schools. Contributors will receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for their donations, \$700 for individual filers and \$1400 for married filing jointly. "Every child in New Mexico deserves access to high-quality education, irrespective of their zip code or socio-economic status," said House GOP Leader Ryan Lane. "This scholarship tax credit program is a significant step towards that goal, putting the power of choice in the hands of parents and students."

The tax credit program is designed to create a competitive educational environment, fostering improvement across all schools. It also serves as a lifeline to students who are currently in underperforming schools, offering them the opportunity to seek better educational avenues. The sponsors remain concerned that spending on public education has increased by 75% since 2014, but significantly fewer students today are able to perform at grade level compared with a decade ago.

Critics argue such a program will divert funds from public schools. However, the tax credit does not take funding away from New Mexico's public school system. "This isn't about private versus public," said Rep. Jim Townsend (R-Artesia). "It's about providing quality education for all our children. We believe competition encourages excellence, and this will benefit all schools in the long run."

House Republicans call for bipartisan support for this critical legislation. This tax credit program is a pragmatic solution that empowers parents, encourages school improvements, and aims to lift New Mexico from the bottom of the education rankings.

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The letter to the Governor and the bill are attached to this press release

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HOUSE BILL **105**

**56TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2024**

INTRODUCED BY

T. Ryan Lane  
James G. Townsend

AN ACT

RELATING TO PRIVATE EDUCATION; PROVIDING FOR THE AUTHORIZATION OF SCHOOL TUITION ORGANIZATIONS TO AWARD EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS TO CERTAIN LOW-INCOME STUDENTS TO ATTEND PRIVATE SCHOOLS; CREATING THE EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP INCOME TAX CREDIT AND THE EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATE INCOME TAX CREDIT.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

**SECTION 1.** [NEW MATERIAL] SCHOOL TUITION ORGANIZATIONS-- AUTHORIZATION TO AWARD EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS.--

A. The department may authorize a school tuition organization to award educational scholarships to eligible students to attend a private school in New Mexico of the students' parents' choice pursuant to this section.

B. A school tuition organization shall apply for

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1 authorization on forms and in a manner prescribed by the  
2 department. To be eligible as a school tuition organization,  
3 the organization shall:

4 (1) allocate at least ninety percent of the  
5 organization's annual revenue received from contributions for  
6 educational scholarships to eligible students to attend private  
7 schools in New Mexico;

8 (2) not limit the availability of educational  
9 scholarships to students of only one private school;

10 (3) not allow donors to designate student  
11 beneficiaries as a condition of any contribution to the  
12 organization or facilitate, encourage or knowingly allow the  
13 exchange of beneficiary student designations;

14 (4) include on the organization's website, if  
15 one exists, the percentage and total dollar amount of  
16 educational scholarships awarded during the previous fiscal  
17 year;

18 (5) award educational scholarships only to  
19 eligible students; and

20 (6) not award educational scholarships to  
21 attend a public, tribal or federal bureau of Indian education  
22 school.

23 C. If an individual educational scholarship exceeds  
24 the tuition of the private school that an eligible student  
25 attends, the amount in excess shall be returned to the school

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1 tuition organization that made the award. The school tuition  
2 organization may allocate the returned amount:

- 3 (1) as a multi-year award for that student; or  
4 (2) for educational scholarships for other  
5 eligible students.

6 D. On or before September 30 of each year, each  
7 school tuition organization shall report electronically to the  
8 department, in a form prescribed by the department, the  
9 following information:

- 10 (1) the name, address and contact person of  
11 the school tuition organization;  
12 (2) the names, job titles and annual salaries  
13 of the three employees who receive the highest annual salaries  
14 from the school tuition organization;  
15 (3) the total number of contributions received  
16 during the previous fiscal year;  
17 (4) the total dollar amount of contributions  
18 received during the previous fiscal year;  
19 (5) the total number of eligible students  
20 awarded educational scholarships during the previous fiscal  
21 year;  
22 (6) the total dollar amount of educational  
23 scholarships awarded during the previous fiscal year;  
24 (7) the total dollar amount of money being  
25 held for eligible students' scholarships in future years,

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1 including the amount allocated as a multi-year award pursuant  
2 to Paragraph (1) of Subsection C of this section, with each  
3 eligible student identified;

4 (8) for each private school to which  
5 educational scholarships were awarded:

6 (a) the name and address of the private  
7 school;

8 (b) the number of educational  
9 scholarships awarded during the previous fiscal year; and

10 (c) the total dollar amount of  
11 educational scholarships awarded during the previous fiscal  
12 year; and

13 (9) the cost of an audit or financial review  
14 required pursuant to Subsections F and G of this section paid  
15 during the fiscal year.

16 E. The department shall post on its website a  
17 report of the information it receives pursuant to Subsection D  
18 of this section on or before January 1 of the calendar year  
19 following the year in which the information is received.

20 F. On or before September 30 of each year, a school  
21 tuition organization that received five hundred thousand  
22 dollars (\$500,000) or more in contributions in the previous  
23 fiscal year shall provide for a financial audit of the  
24 organization. The audit shall be conducted in accordance with  
25 generally accepted auditing standards and shall evaluate the

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1 organization's compliance with Paragraph (1) of Subsection B of  
2 this section. The audit shall be conducted by an independent  
3 certified public accountant licensed pursuant to the 1999  
4 Public Accountancy Act. The certified public accountant and  
5 the firm the certified public accountant is affiliated with  
6 shall be independent with respect to the organization, its  
7 officers and directors, services performed and all other  
8 independent relationships prescribed by generally accepted  
9 auditing standards.

10 G. On or before September 30 of each year, a school  
11 tuition organization that received less than five hundred  
12 thousand dollars (\$500,000) in total donations in the previous  
13 fiscal year shall provide for a financial review of the  
14 organization. The review shall be conducted in accordance with  
15 standards for accounting and review services and shall evaluate  
16 the organization's compliance with the fiscal requirements of  
17 this section. The review shall be conducted by an independent  
18 certified public accountant licensed pursuant to the 1999  
19 Public Accountancy Act. The certified public accountant and  
20 the firm the certified public accountant is affiliated with  
21 shall be independent with respect to the organization, its  
22 officers and directors, services performed and all other  
23 independent relationships prescribed by generally accepted  
24 auditing standards.

25 H. Within five days after receiving an audit or

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1 financial review, the school tuition organization shall file a  
2 signed copy of the audit or financial review with the  
3 department. The school tuition organization shall pay the fees  
4 and costs of the audit or financial review from the  
5 organization's operating budget. The fees and costs shall be  
6 excluded from the calculation of revenues spent on educational  
7 scholarships.

8 I. The department shall:

9 (1) maintain a public registry of authorized  
10 school tuition organizations;

11 (2) make the registry available to the public  
12 on request; and

13 (3) post the registry on the department's  
14 website.

15 J. As used in this section:

16 (1) "department" means the public education  
17 department;

18 (2) "eligible student" means a qualified  
19 student, as defined in the Public School Finance Act, who  
20 resides in New Mexico and is member of a household for which  
21 the total annual income does not exceed an amount used to  
22 qualify for a reduced-price lunch through the federal school  
23 lunch programs established pursuant to 42 USCA Sections 1751  
24 through 1769, as amended; provided that once a student becomes  
25 an eligible student, receives an educational scholarship and

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1 continuously attends the private school, the student shall  
2 remain an eligible student regardless of household income until  
3 the student graduates from high school or reaches twenty-one  
4 years of age, and:

5 (a) attended a public school in New  
6 Mexico as a full-time student for at least one full semester  
7 immediately prior to receiving an educational scholarship and  
8 enrolling in and transferring to a private school; or

9 (b) attended, as a full-time student, a  
10 home school in New Mexico that meets the requirements of the  
11 Public School Code for at least one full semester immediately  
12 prior to receiving an educational scholarship and enrolling in  
13 and transferring to a private school;

14 (3) "nonprofit organization" means an  
15 organization that has been granted exemption from the federal  
16 income tax by the United States commissioner of internal  
17 revenue as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the  
18 United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended or  
19 renumbered; and

20 (4) "school tuition organization" means a  
21 nonprofit organization with a principal place of business in  
22 New Mexico that provides education scholarships to eligible  
23 students attending private schools in New Mexico of their  
24 parents' choice."

25 SECTION 2. A new section of the Income Tax Act is enacted

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to read:

"~~[NEW MATERIAL]~~ EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP INCOME TAX

CREDIT.--

A. A taxpayer who is not a dependent of another individual and who makes a contribution to a school tuition organization pursuant to Section 1 of this 2024 act may apply for, and the department may allow, a credit against the taxpayer's tax liability imposed pursuant to the Income Tax Act. The tax credit provided by this section may be referred to as the "educational scholarship income tax credit".

B. The amount of the tax credit allowed by this section shall be in an amount equal to the amount contributed to a school tuition organization in a taxable year, not to exceed seven hundred dollars (\$700) for single individuals and married individuals filing separate returns and one thousand four hundred dollars (\$1,400) for heads of household, surviving spouses and married individuals filing joint returns; provided that for the taxable year beginning January 1, 2025 and each taxable year thereafter, the amount of credit shall be adjusted to account for inflation. The department shall allow a tax credit only for a contribution certified pursuant to Subsection C of this section.

C. A taxpayer shall apply for certification of eligibility for the tax credit allowed by this section from the public education department on forms and in the manner

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1 prescribed by that department. The application shall include  
2 evidence of a contribution to a school tuition organization  
3 made pursuant to Section 1 of this 2024 act.

4 D. A taxpayer may claim the tax credit allowed by  
5 this section for the taxable year in which the taxpayer makes a  
6 contribution to a school tuition organization. To receive the  
7 tax credit, a taxpayer shall apply to the department on forms  
8 and in the manner prescribed by the department within twelve  
9 months following the calendar year in which the contribution is  
10 made. The application shall include a certification made  
11 pursuant to Subsection C of this section.

12 E. That portion of the credit that exceeds a  
13 taxpayer's tax liability in the taxable year in which the  
14 credit is claimed shall not be refunded to the taxpayer but may  
15 be carried forward for the following three consecutive taxable  
16 years until the amount of the tax credit is exhausted.

17 F. A taxpayer allowed a tax credit pursuant to this  
18 section shall report the amount of the tax credit to the  
19 department in a manner required by that department.

20 G. The department shall compile an annual report on  
21 the tax credit that shall include the number of taxpayers  
22 approved by the department to receive the tax credit, the  
23 aggregate amount of tax credits approved and any other  
24 information necessary to evaluate the tax credit. The  
25 department shall present the report to the revenue

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1 stabilization and tax policy committee and the legislative  
2 finance committee with an analysis of the cost of the tax  
3 credit."

4 SECTION 3. A new section of the Corporate Income and  
5 Franchise Tax Act is enacted to read:

6 "[NEW MATERIAL] EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATE INCOME  
7 TAX CREDIT.--

8 A. A taxpayer that makes a contribution to a school  
9 tuition organization pursuant to Section 1 of this 2024 act may  
10 apply for, and the department may allow, a credit against the  
11 taxpayer's tax liability imposed pursuant to the Corporate  
12 Income and Franchise Tax Act. The tax credit provided by this  
13 section may be referred to as the "educational scholarship  
14 corporate income tax credit".

15 B. The amount of the tax credit allowed by this  
16 section shall be in an amount equal to the amount contributed  
17 to a school tuition organization in a taxable year, not to  
18 exceed one thousand four hundred dollars (\$1,400); provided  
19 that for the taxable year beginning January 1, 2025 and each  
20 taxable year thereafter, the amount of credit shall be adjusted  
21 to account for inflation. The department shall allow a tax  
22 credit only for a contribution certified pursuant to Subsection  
23 C of this section.

24 C. A taxpayer shall apply for certification of  
25 eligibility for the tax credit allowed by this section from the

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1 public education department on forms and in the manner  
2 prescribed by that department. The application shall include  
3 evidence of a contribution to a school tuition organization  
4 made pursuant to Section 1 of this 2024 act.

5 D. A taxpayer may claim the tax credit allowed by  
6 this section for the taxable year in which the taxpayer makes a  
7 contribution to a school tuition organization. To receive the  
8 tax credit, a taxpayer shall apply to the department on forms  
9 and in the manner prescribed by the department within twelve  
10 months following the calendar year in which the contribution is  
11 made. The application shall include a certification made  
12 pursuant to Subsection C of this section.

13 E. That portion of the credit that exceeds a  
14 taxpayer's tax liability in the taxable year in which the  
15 credit is claimed shall not be refunded to the taxpayer but may  
16 be carried forward for the following three consecutive taxable  
17 years until the amount of the tax credit is exhausted.

18 F. A taxpayer allowed a tax credit pursuant to this  
19 section shall report the amount of the tax credit to the  
20 department in a manner required by that department.

21 G. The department shall compile an annual report on  
22 the tax credit that shall include the number of taxpayers  
23 approved by the department to receive the tax credit, the  
24 aggregate amount of tax credits approved and any other  
25 information necessary to evaluate the tax credit. The

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1 department shall present the report to the revenue  
2 stabilization and tax policy committee and the legislative  
3 finance committee with an analysis of the cost of the tax  
4 credit."

5 SECTION 4. APPLICABILITY.--The provisions of Sections 2  
6 and 3 of this act apply to taxable years beginning on or after  
7 January 1, 2024.



State of New Mexico  
House of Representatives  
State Capitol  
Santa Fe

January 11, 2024

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Governor, State of New Mexico  
State Capitol, Room 400  
480 Old Santa Fe Trail  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Governor:

We have prefiled House Bill 105 and are writing to request a special message so the bill can be included in the public policy debate during the upcoming 30-day legislative session. The bill establishes a tax credit for contributions made to nonprofit organizations that will use those contributions to provide scholarships to low-income students to attend private school. This legislation will empower families and students with choice, particularly those who find themselves in economically disadvantaged circumstances.

The ideal education system includes an unfettered market in which all students have the financial means to attend their school of choice. Accessible choice helps parents choose a school that aligns with their values and educational preferences and best serves their children academically and socially. Too many New Mexico students, however, continue to remain trapped in underperforming neighborhood schools that are failing to adequately support the unique academic needs of their students.


Despite significant investments in public schools over the past decade, fewer students can demonstrate grade level mastery of reading and math today compared with their peers a decade ago, when the *Martinez* and *Yazzie* sufficiency lawsuit was initially filed. At that time, similar to arguments made nationally by staunch supporters of public education, the plaintiffs were arguing New Mexico public schools were failing at-risk students (including economically disadvantaged students) primarily because insufficient resources were being appropriated annually to public education to maintain the “uniform system of free public schools sufficient for the education of, and open to, all the children of school age in the state...” the New Mexico Constitution guarantees. Since that time, state appropriations for public schools have grown by 75 percent – from almost \$2.6 billion in FY14 to more than \$4.5 billion in FY24 (this also doesn’t account for additional, significant one-time finds schools have received from the federal government since 2020). The most recent statewide test score data from the 2022-2023 school year, however, shows almost 27 percent fewer students can read on grade level than during the 2013-2014 school year, and more than 51 percent fewer students can do math on grade level.

Albert Einstein once said, “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.” This is precisely what we have done with our public education system, and we are failing our children. House Bill 105 will give low-income families the autonomy to make real decisions


about their children's education; it elevates these parents to the rightful role as decisionmakers, rather than maintaining the status quo in which low-income families cannot afford to choose to send their children to any school other than their neighborhood school. This bill provides an avenue to eliminate educational disparities experienced by many of our low-income and at-risk students.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for a special message for House Bill 105.

Sincerely,



T. Ryan Lane  
House Republican Leader District 3



James Townsend  
State Representative District 54