



## Who Supports Illinois' Invest in Kids Voucher Program?

Voucher programs around the country—whether in the form of traditional vouchers, education savings accounts (ESAs), or tax credit scholarships—are supported by well funded and organized groups. These include: [Americans for Prosperity](#) (the [Koch brothers' 501c4](#)), the [American Legislative Education Council](#) (ALEC), the [American Federation for Children](#) (Betsy DeVos' 501c4), [Moms for Liberty](#) and the [Heritage Foundation](#), among others.

What do these organizations have in common? They work openly to discredit public schools and push a privatization agenda, using the slogans of *school choice*, *education freedom* and *parent rights*.

**Are these groups in Illinois? Yes!**

DeVos' [American Federation for Children](#) hired a full time lobbyist in Springfield in February 2022, [Nate Hoffman](#). In addition, AFC has a [PAC](#), the [Illinois Federation for Children](#), formed in March 2022, chaired by Hoffman, which spent [more than \\$700K](#) on Illinois elections in 2022.

Hoffman [previously worked](#) for [Empower Illinois, the largest Invest in Kids scholarship granting organization](#) (SGO), i.e. an organizational middleman for voucher distribution; and now works for ExcelinEd, [Jeb Bush's ed privatization think tank](#). He is a board member of Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR), an national organization founded by Megyn Kelly that has been [active locally](#) in [Evanston IL to oppose diversity, equity and inclusion](#) efforts.

The Illinois affiliate connected to the [State Policy Network](#), a sister organization to ALEC, is the [Illinois Policy Institute](#), known for its role in the anti-union [Janus decision](#), is [a major supporter of Invest in Kids](#). You can watch a [recent video where AFC's Hoffman is interviewed by IPI's Hilary Gowins, senior vice president of the Illinois Policy Institute here](#).

[Moms for Liberty](#) [lists four chapters in Illinois](#), and two of their chapter leaders are also leaders of [Awake IL](#) ([DuPage County](#), [Cook County](#).) Both of these groups have actively worked against covid mitigation measures in schools, comprehensive sex education, social-emotional learning, as well as teaching about race and honest history. They have promoted book bans at schools and libraries, for material on topics like LGBTQ+ individuals, and race. In January 2022, the head of Awake IL and chair of Moms for Liberty DuPage County [attended and spoke at an anti-transgender rights Heritage Foundation conference](#).

Awake IL's [parental bill of rights](#) calls for allowing parents to “take their children’s taxpayer-funded education dollars to the education providers of their choosing whether public or private,” and the [document](#) links that phrase to the [Education Freedom Pledge](#) of the American Federation of Children, a pledge signed [by a single Illinois lawmaker thus far](#). They extol their support for “[education freedom](#)” on social media, and one of their board members runs a chain of private schools that [Awake promotes](#)

[on their website](#), along with [other new private schools](#).

Betsy DeVos [headlined](#) the Moms for Liberty conference in July 2022, which featured [a session on “education freedom,”](#) aka an even broader set of ways to funnel public dollars to private education schemes.

### **What other organizations support Invest in Kids in Illinois?**

The main beneficiaries of Invest in Kids include the [Archdiocese of Chicago](#) and other organizations that run or support religious schools. 95% of Invest in Kids’ \$75M in vouchers went to religious schools in 2021-2022—at least 40% (\$30M) of that to 349 Catholic schools, and at least 28% (\$20M) to 19 Jewish schools.

There are two scholarship granting organizations (SGO) connected to the Archdiocese, the [Big Shoulders Fund](#) and [Empower Illinois](#). Empower IL, the state’s largest SGO, was formed in 2012, originally called Freedom to Learn IL and then One Chance IL. Empower was key in drafting and passing the Invest in Kids Act in 2017. [Dan Proft](#) was an original board member of Freedom to Learn. Juan

Rangel, [known for his role in multiple scandals connected to the UNO Charter chain in Chicago](#), is on the staff of Empower.

Scholarship granting organizations can use up to 5% of their contributions for operating costs, including lobbying, which would be ~\$2.4M for Empower and \$1.2M for Big Shoulders in 2021-2022.

Another active group [lobbying for Invest in Kids](#) is [Agudath Israel of Illinois](#), [sending busloads of voucher supporters to Springfield](#) at a time. Vouchers are [a national policy priority](#) for Agudath Israel. Agudath of IL’s primary SGO partner on Invest in Kids is Empower IL; one of their executive committee members, is on the [Empower board of directors](#) and the board of several schools accepting vouchers. Agudath went as far as [setting up a warehouse in 2018 with hundreds of computers and fiber optic lines to get students’ applications to Invest in Kids completed](#).

### **What does all this mean for citizens concerned about public funds supporting private schools?**

Here’s a question to ask your state representative and state senator:

*Why would a legislator who considers themselves pro-public education support a program that sends public tax dollars to private religious schools, and thereby align themselves with groups affiliated with Betsy DeVos, the Koch Brothers and other conservative organizations who support policies to dismantle public education that they reject?*

Public dollars should be used to support public schools which open their doors to *all* kids without discriminating on the basis of religion, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity. Public education and public schools are a public good that benefits everyone.

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More information about the Invest in Kids voucher program, why it needs to end, and what you can do to make that happen at:

[ilfps.org/sunsetinvestILvouchers](http://ilfps.org/sunsetinvestILvouchers)