



August 7, 2023

Action Requested: Vote Yes on Section F of Agenda for Interim Finance Committee Meeting Scheduled for Wednesday, August 9

Dear Members of the Interim Finance Committee:

My name is Pauline Lee and I am a Board Member of Keystone Corporation, a nonpartisan pro-business organization dedicated to keeping Nevada business friendly.

On behalf of our organization and our business community, we strongly urge members of this Committee to vote Yes on Section F to transfer \$3,235,000 in monies from the federal American Rescue Plan Act and other Covid related bills to fund the Nevada Educational Choice Scholarship Program for the 2023-2024 school year for the following reasons.

1. **The Business Community supports and needs options to improve our Education System.** Nevada is facing a severe labor shortage. Nevada is also facing a shortage of qualified, career-ready employees. (See "How do I do that? The New Hires of 2023 are Unprepared for Work", by Douglas Belkin, Ben Chapman and Ben Kisling, Wall Street Journal, August 2, 2023.) This phenomenon can be blamed on remote learning caused by the pandemic shutdown. The purpose of the federal Covid funds is to shore up and cure the negative impacts caused by the pandemic shutdown. Undoubtedly, education has been negatively impacted. Accordingly, education in all forms and options needs to be "shored up". Funding opportunity scholarship for hundreds of children to ensure that they continue their preferred mode of education is a very appropriate use of the Covid funds.

2. **The purpose of the American Rescue Plan Act and other federal bills was designed to help families with economic need.** All of the Opportunity Scholarship recipients have economic need. The average household income of students participating in the program is less than \$57,000. These families enrolled their children in private school in anticipation of and in reliance upon receiving their scholarships. These families have kept their children in private schools because their children are doing better and are receiving a far better education for their individual needs. There is no better use of the Covid funds than to help our families get back on their feet financially and to give them education options.

3. **Other States have successfully used Covid money to improve education.** Governor Lee of Tennessee directed \$4 million of Covid money to allow families to put their children into schools chosen specifically to help with their childrens' needs. (Associated Press, "Some Governors use Federal Virus Aid to Expand School Choice" by Geoff Mulvihill, August 20, 2021). New Jersey, Oregon, Indiana and Colorado also funneled Covid money to establish grants to public schools and colleges. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey used a separate pot of federal pandemic aid to create a \$10 million grant initiative similar to the state's existing private school voucher program. Oklahoma's GOP governor, Kevin Stitt, used \$10 million of the nearly \$40 million in his governor-controlled fund to create a stay-in-school program that funded scholarships for lower-income students who already attend private schools. Governors in Florida and New Hampshire also used portions of their

discretionary money for private-school scholarship programs. These States are using their Covid funds to reinforce and bolster their education system through scholarships and grants.

4. **Over \$2 Billion of the Budget has already been allocated to Public Schools.**

Allocating a mere \$3.2 million to opportunity scholarships is a mere pittance to the over \$2 Billion in funding already given to public schools during the last legislative session. It is barely .16% of the amount of funding allocated to public schools. Yet private school enrollment is increasing at a rapid rate because of the negative impact caused by the Covid shutdown. (See Nevada Department of Education report on Nevada Private School Enrollment Data, 2022-2023) Interestingly, Nevada private schools are composed of 33% minority students. Using Covid funds for Opportunity Scholarships does not hamper or take away from our public school programs. It only enhances education for all of our students.

In the words of Governor Bill Lee of Tennessee, "Education is not one size fits all, and the pandemic showed us just how important it is to provide families with better access to high-quality school options."

Nevada has a lot of catch-up to do on education. Implementing Plan F should be part of Nevada's plan to rescue our State's education system.

Sincerely,

Pauline Ng Lee

Pauline Lee
Board Member & Communications Director
Keystone Corporation
keystonersvp@gmail.com

Reference:

Link to "How do I do That? The New Hires of 2023 are Unprepared for Work" by Douglas Belkin, Ben Chapman and Ben Kisling, Wall Street Journal, August 2, 2023 –
https://www.wfj.com//articles/lost-learning-remote-pandemic-workplace-skills-new-employees-51351b33?mod=Searchresults_pos2&page=1

Associated Press, "Some Governors use Federal Virus Aid to Expand School Choice" by Geoff Mulvihill, August 20, 2021
<https://apnews.com/article/business-health-education-coronavirus-pandemic-school-choice-efe85ad624d092b6eff700b635103a02>