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# School voucher measure makes it to House floor

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AUSTIN— The House Public Education Committee's vote Thursday to send a voucher bill to the full House sparked a heated debate about using tax money to educate children at private schools.

The panel approved House Bill 2465 on a 5-3 vote in a meeting on the House floor during a break in the chamber's regular business.

The bill would establish a pilot voucher program for children of low-income families in urban school districts. Participating private schools would have to test students and make the scores public. Under the measure, 10 percent of the money for a student would stay with a public school district and 90 percent would go to the private school.

Teacher groups are strongly opposed to the bill.

"We wonder why the vote was taken at the chairman's desk on the floor of the House and not in committee where the public would be fully aware that a vote was on the agenda," Larry Comer, director of public relations for the 100,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators, said in a written statement.

Samantha Smoot, executive director of the Texas Freedom Network, noted the commit-

## EDUCATION The House education

panel's vote sparks a war of words.

tee's split vote in a written statement.

"This voucher bill is so fiscally irresponsible that it drew bipartisan opposition," she said in the statement. "Texans know that now is not the time to drain millions more from our public schools."

The revised bill that the committee approved contains a cap designed to limit the effects of vouchers on public schools.



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The cap would be 5 percent of the children in a district or 3 percent of the operating budget of a district, whichever is smaller. The latter refers to the amount of money that would leave the district when a child goes to a private school.

Byron Schlomach, the chief of staff for House Public Education Committee Chairman Kent Grusendorf, R-Arlington, rejected the allegations that the committee acted improperly.

"They're just flat-out lying when they say that this was done in haste and somehow secret," he said.

Schlomach said opponents had ample opportunity to air their views at the March 18 public hearing on the bill. Hundreds of people attended the hearing and testimony lasted late into the evening.

Michael Sullivan, a spokesman for the pro-voucher Texas Public Policy Foundation, praised Grusendorf for raising vouchers as an issue.

"Parents who have children struggling, whose needs aren't currently being met, children from families that can't afford private school — all those people are very happy that this action is being taken," he said.

Grusendorf was joined in voting for the bill by Reps. Rob Eissler, R-The Woodlands, Jerry Madden, R-Richardson, Dan Branch, R-Dallas, and Harold Dutton, D-Houston.

Reps. Bob Griggs, R-North Richland Hills, Glenda Dawson, R-Pearland, and Scott Hochberg, D-Houston, voted against the bill.

Griggs, former Birdville school district superintendent, said in a written statement that his vote was one of the toughest of his freshman session.

"The overwhelming majority of communications with residents of District 91 ... was against the creation of a voucher system in Texas," he said.

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