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February 10, 2022

To: Assembly Committee on Education

Re: Statement Opposing Assembly Bills 964 and 969

The League of Women voters has long championed an educational system that provides “equal educational opportunity for each child through an equitable state aids formula while retaining substantial program and personnel responsibilities in the local district.” In other words, a system that lives up to our constitutional ideals while preserving local control.

We oppose AB 964 because it fails this standard. The bill proposes to provide tax credits to individuals in response to decisions made about educational delivery by locally elected school boards. It makes no mention of how these credits will be funded, nor does it provide any rationale for why a district’s decision on mode of delivery during a pandemic should have any bearing on property taxes assessed and collected. Local school officials are in the best position to understand local conditions and the effects of the pandemic on both their students and staff and their decisions on mode of delivery deserve deference and not an after-the-fact response in the form of tax credits.

Likewise, we oppose AB 969 because it too fails to address the real needs of schools and school districts – adequate and equitable resources to meet the needs of students as they grow, develop, and learn. Instead, this bill requires the expenditure of funds for the purpose of armed school resource officers. Once again, local school officials are in the best position to know whether and when such a resource is needed. To require the use of funds based on a formula that includes crime data unrelated to school activities, students, and school personnel, is both misguided and fiscally irresponsible as the proposed “solution” of a school resource officer may bear no relation to data that required the expenditure in the first place. Moreover, the bill would require DPI use funds received under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 for this purpose, in direct violation of the permissible use of those federal funds. The provision of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that affects schools is called the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief or ESSER. As ESSER makes explicit, the funds may only be permissibly used to address the educational impacts of COVID-19. This use proposed by this AB969 is unrelated to this purpose and would therefore place in jeopardy all funds received by the state under its approved ESSER plan.