

Public Education

Testimony by Benicio Mendiola-Johnson

1-24-22

Good Afternoon distinguished Senators,

My name is Benicio Mendiola-Johnson and I stand here today to encourage the passage of SF384 and reinforce the idea that money should not dictate politics. We the people should.

The Supreme Court's decision on January 21, 2010 in *Citizens United v. FEC*, marked a turning point in our democracy's history, a decision that impacts all of us but especially our nation's and Minnesota's children and education. I am the son of two St. Paul Public school workers like my parents I became a teacher. I am a CDA-certified teacher at Mi Familia Child Care Center. Many of the students I encounter attend or will attend the public schools in my neighborhood. Public Education is something that I view as something of immense value and importance. Unfortunately, our public school and their curriculum are being warped by corporations and politicians who are influenced by dark money.

"Educate and inform the whole mass of the people, enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve it" (Jefferson, 1787). As mentioned, the right to an education, specifically public education is a pillar to the American dream. It is key to the American democracy, a democracy cannot be sustained without education. We have all seen them: the fliers, the billboards, the commercials, you cannot escape them during political season. Many of these ads can be accredited to PACs. For the past 10 years PACs have gone sickomode on their attacks on public education. There has been a push by PACs like Make Liberty Win to

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gut K-12 education. MLW spent \$135,000 accusing politicians of wasting money on K-12 education and passing curricula that would indoctrinate our children (TransparencyUSA 2022). Both blatant lies. Corporations having first amendment rights enables them to lie and to push their own agenda, an agenda that doesn't better the average American, an agenda that doesn't better our public schools. This agenda includes the privatization of k-12 education. In recent years PACs have been pouring money into races in states like Oklahoma and West Virginia (Gott 2018). These PACs' goals are to lobby against candidates who are pro-public school and to support candidates who are anti-public schools and pro-warping curriculum to corporation's liking. These PACs and Corporations with their first amendment rights are indirectly and directly affecting teachers like my parents and students that I taught at the childcare center I worked at. Their idea of school dissolves the institution of public education, undermining the idea that education is an entitlement the government is responsible for providing (Berkshire 2017).

When I think about *Citizens United v FEC* I think about my parents and the curriculum they teach the students of our capital city. I also think of the vast amount of students that I have encountered as a preschool teacher that will attend public schools hoping that the public schools that I attended will be just as capable of educating them. An aye vote for SF384 bill is a vote for our children, our teachers and our future.

Thank you so much for your time.

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