'CHOOSE'... MYTHS or FACTS?

About the
'Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education' Act

Q Is there a cap on CHOOSE expenditures?

A **ABSOLUTELY NOT.** The bill clearly says – the Legislature must appropriate no less than $100 million -- no matter the condition of the ETF, no matter the balance of the CHOOSE account. This will be a budget battle every year.

Q Will the cost to the ETF for CHOOSE increase?

A **YES.** In year three of implementation, there are no income limits on who can apply for the program which will greatly expand the number of eligible participants. Any parent who now pays private school tuition to an accredited school (or one seeking accreditation) and all qualifying home schoolers will be in line for a new government entitlement program. A similar program is causing a $1 billion shortfall in Arizona. The CHOOSE Act gives priority to those students and their siblings already in the program, so as more parents sign up, lawmakers will be pressured to increase the annual appropriation or have lots of unhappy parents who are eligible but are not getting their handout.

Q Will CHOOSE HELP poor students?

A **SOME.** Practically speaking, this bill largely benefits the middle class and the wealthy. Economically disadvantaged students benefit from services most private schools do not provide such as transportation or free or low-cost meals which private schools generally do not provide, and the ESA may not cover all tuition and fees. There are fewer school choices in economically depressed areas. The bill prioritizes families at 300 percent of the poverty level, yet there is nothing to prevent a multi-millionaire from getting $28k of state subsidies to send his four children to private schools. And once the wealthy or middle class get in the program, they have priority. To be clear, all private schools – but especially your high-dollar private schools charging more than $17k a year -- have an economic incentive to participate. These elite private schools will be able to increase their academic offerings courtesy of Alabama taxpayers. A further divide between the haves and have nots.

Q Will CHOOSE improve public education?

A **NO.** This bill is not about improving public education. The economic theory that public schools will improve if there is competition is just that – a theory that has been soundly disproven. Public schools don't get to "choose" their students. Let's flip this concept: If public schools "improved" with vouchers, would it mean those who took the vouchers were the underachievers and the reason for public education's struggles?

Q Will CHOOSE hurt public schools?

A **YES.** The basic economic principle of overhead costs has NOT been soundly disproven. A school losing 10 percent of its students across several grade levels to vouchers still has the same overhead. Teacher salaries do not go down, and building operational costs do not change, but now the school has fewer dollars to cover those costs. Equally important is the potential loss of parent and community support. Public education is the foundation for strong communities. The bill will amount to the state of Alabama funding two systems of public education -- one private and one public.

Q WILL CHOOSE benefit students with disabilities?

A **SOME.** While the program would prioritize students with IEPs, there are very few niche schools for students with disabilities, and most are very expensive, so there is not a lot of choice. But private schools do not – and will not – provide the expensive and expansive services public schools are required to provide to these students.

Q Will CHOOSE benefit students in rural areas?

A **PROBABLY NOT.** There are very few educational alternatives in the rural areas of our state – which is most of it. See for yourself: **AlabamaSchoolBoards.org/PrivateSchoolDensity**

Q Will students get to CHOOSE their schools?

A **NO.** The bill does not require any school to enroll any student. Schools participating will cherry pick their students – especially if they can shoot three-pointers or can run fast. This bill allows private schools to choose -- not parents.