

NC Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission

Resolution to Ensure the Opportunity to a Sound Basic Education for Every Child in NC and Prioritize Public Schools

WHEREAS the MLK Commission is tasked with promoting among the people of North Carolina an awareness and appreciation of the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr.; and

WHEREAS in his remarks upon receiving the John Dewey Award from the United Federation of Teachers, Dr. King recognized education as a primary “battleground in the freedom struggle...[and] one of the vital tools the Negro needs in order to advance.” He also stated “The richest nation on Earth has never allocated enough resources to build sufficient schools, to adequately compensate its teachers, and to surround them with the prestige our work justifies;” and

WHEREAS Dr. King famously said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character,” and

WHEREAS, North Carolina’s constitution requires that the state ensures that all children have the opportunity to have access to a sound, basic education; and

WHEREAS the current lack of adequate funding restricts the academic and vocational opportunities of our youth, undermines the economic progress and equity initiatives of our state and contributes to the likelihood of incarceration, poorer health outcomes and poverty; and

WHEREAS, on May 23, 2023, the Governor of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper declared a state of emergency for public education of students in North Carolina; and

WHEREAS the Leandro Plan outlines a comprehensive plan that would invest in public education, delivering on every North Carolinian child’s constitutionally enforceable right of the opportunity to a sound basic public education, provided by the state from “cradle to career”; and

WHEREAS, Pursuant to Leandro versus. NC, persistent inequities in access to opportunities disproportionately impact Black children, low-wealth/rural communities, children with disabilities and children who come from English Learning families in our public school system; and

WHEREAS, 8 in 10 of North Carolina’s school-aged children attend public schools the General Assembly continues to expand the private school voucher program by eliminating income requirements enabling any student to attend private school, despite the program already supporting low-moderate income families in attending private schools; and

WHEREAS, This Opportunity Scholarship Program has no evidence ensuring improvements in academic performance, and according to the OSBM, could divert as much as \$203 million from public schools to private schools; and

WHEREAS, Only 7% of the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan was funded in 2023/2024 budget and only 3.8% in the 2024/2025 budget; and

WHEREAS, the state of North Carolina is well able to fully fund the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan, having \$6B in the treasury and receiving national recognition for the strength of our economy in 2022 and 2023; and

WHEREAS, studies confirm that the most important factor in student success is the classroom teacher; therefore, our public schools need significant increases in funding to fill teacher vacancies and provide competitive pay comparable to neighboring States, to successfully recruit and retain qualified teachers; and

WHEREAS, investments in early childhood education and child care is a positive economic driver that helps to set young children on a path to success in school, allows parents to go to work, helps businesses find and keep employees; and

WHEREAS, a strong K-12 public education system is the key to North Carolina's continued success and assures our students are fully prepared to participate in the workforce, that they are well-informed, and that they can contribute to their communities; and

WHEREAS, over 80% of North Carolina voters say the lack of child care is a problem that will not solve itself and that improving quality and making child care more affordable is a good use of taxpayer money, and that 87% of voters say taking action to ensure more working families have access to affordable, quality child care should be an important priority for North Carolina this year.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

North Carolina Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission urges our elected officials to act expeditiously in accordance with the NC Supreme Court decisions over the last 29 years and prioritize the children of our state, invest in cultivating our emerging workforce and support public education by:

1. Reversing the unlimited expansion of the state's private school voucher program that drains desperately needed funding from public education and increasing accountability for private schools participating in the program.
2. Making significant and immediate investments in teacher salaries and compensation to be competitive with neighboring states and to make North Carolina 1st in the Southeast in average teacher pay.
3. Encouraging all state level elected officials to exercise the full extent of their authority and influence to implement the Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan, and upholding the November 4, 2022, NC Supreme Court Decision and recommended by Judge David Lee in 2020 to immediately release what remains of the \$1.7 billion owed to our public school system.

Unanimously adopted by those present at the NC Martin Luther King Commission meeting on October 25, 2023.