TO: The Honorable Members of the PA Senate Education Committee
FROM: Aaron Riggleman, Manager, Government Affairs
DATE: May 7th, 2024
RE: Support S.B. 795 – Lifeline Scholarships

I write on behalf of the PA Chamber to urge support for S.B. 795. We understand your committee may consider this bill today.

Under S.B. 795, parents with children in grades 1-12, who reside within the attendance area of a district school in the bottom of performance metrics based on state testing, would be eligible to receive a scholarship for education expenses associated with new education instruction.

The Legislature has made historic investments in public schools, to the tune of a nearly 60 percent increase in total K-12 spending, over the last decade. Evaluating per-pupil funding specifically from the state, Pennsylvania ranks 21st in the nation, about 10 percent above the national average. When you consider all sources of spending, including federal and local, Pennsylvania jumps to the 11th highest per pupil spending in the nation, or 27 percent above the national average. Additionally, according to the National Education Association, Pennsylvania has the 10th highest starting teacher salary in the country and the 6th highest top salary for teachers with a bachelor's degree.

Despite these above-average spending figures, Pennsylvania students continue to perform at or below the national average on state testing in reading, math, and science. These trends portend significant challenges ahead for students and Pennsylvania employers' ability to find and hire qualified applicants.

Our member-driven, board-approved education policy statement specifically outlines support for "policies that provide and strengthen competitive educational systems and programs, that provide options for parents and students."

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support S.B. 795. Please contact Aaron Riggleman at ariggleman@pachamber.org or 724-640-3290 with questions or to discuss.