

Historic March

On January 19, 2016, thousands of parents, students, teachers and supporters marched on the Florida Capitol to protest a lawsuit filed by the state teacher union against the tax-credit scholarship program. That lawsuit threatens to evict 78,000 low-income students, mostly of color, from schools their parents believe work best for them. Here is what speakers at the rally had to say about the program and the lawsuit.

Martin Luther King III, civil rights leader and eldest son of Martin Luther King Jr.



“This is about justice. This is about righteousness. This is about truth. This is about freedom – the freedom to choose what is best for your family and your child most importantly.”

Bishop Victor Curry, New Birth Baptist Church. Miami, Fla.



“Our fight is about equal educational opportunity. It is about educational freedom. The tax-credit scholarship, which is now 15 years old, is an equalizer. It says that all children should have an equal opportunity to a quality education.”

Rev. H.K. Matthews, civil rights leader. Pensacola, Fla.



“You’re here to say to the union, ‘Nothing is more important than my child.’ You’re here to say, ‘We will not stand idly by while you try to take away our scholarship.’ It ain’t going happen! We’re here to say, ‘Drop the suit!’”

Rev. R.B. Holmes, Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. Tallahassee, Fla.



“Parents who send their children to private schools pay taxes also. They contribute to this economy. They work hard. They love their children...They give their children their best, and nobody ought to take these scholarships away from our children! No! No! No! You can’t do it! We’ve come too far! You cannot kick these students out of their schools!”

Julio Fuentes, CEO of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options. Wellington, Fla.



“This is the only program that exclusively serves low-income students. Our opponents think that if you don’t have a lot of money you won’t fight back. They don’t think you’re smart enough. Or tough enough. Or connected enough. They think you all are going to roll over and let this pass.”

Jeannette Ruiz, mother of scholarship student Valentin Mendez. Miami, Fla.



“The scholarship saved my son. I know all parents here today have stories like mine and Valentin's. I know you all have a message for the union. Don’t evict our children from their schools. Don’t crush our children’s hopes and dreams. Do the right thing. Do it now. Drop the suit.”

Faith Manuel, single mother of three scholarship graduates. Ormond Beach, Fla.



“I urge the Florida teachers union and the other plaintiffs to open their hearts, put politics aside, and truly listen to the families who benefit from the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program. It’s changing lives, and yes, in many cases, saving them. Please think of our kids.”