



PROPONENT TESTIMONY

**GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE BUDGET:
GATOR SCHOLARSHIP EXPANSION**

May 7, 2026

VERBAL AND WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE

LOUISIANA SENATE
Finance Committee

TESTIMONY BY

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Chairman Womack, Vice Chairwoman Cloud, and members of this committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Michael Shires, and I submit this testimony on behalf of the America First Policy Institute (AFPI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that develops research and policy to put the American people first.

My remarks address one item in the Governor’s Executive Budget: the \$44 million increase in discretionary appropriations for the Louisiana Giving All True Opportunity to Rise (GATOR) Scholarship Program. AFPI takes no position on the remainder of the budget.

Conservative leaders across the country are prioritizing education scholarship account programs—like GATOR—because they are responding to parental demand. Alabama, Arkansas, and Oklahoma recently approved \$185 million, \$309 million, and \$275 million, respectively, for education choice. Texas is on the verge of investing \$1 billion in Education Savings Accounts, or ESAs. These programs are large and growing because families are increasingly demanding control over how and where their children learn. Moreover, legislators are recognizing that ESAs are a more efficient use of taxpayer funds than leaving children in zip code-assigned public schools, which spend significantly more per pupil than ESAs.

The question before the Senate Finance Committee is this: Should GATOR be funded at the level families want? Unequivocally, the answer should be yes. Last year, 35,000 students applied and were deemed eligible for scholarships. Governor Landry proposed \$93 million to begin meeting that demand. But the Legislature approved less than half of his request, and only 2% of newly eligible applicants received a scholarship. The current budget proposal for FY 27 begins to close that gap—providing thousands more families with options to meet the unique needs of each child.

President Trump and Secretary McMahon have made education choice—for every child, in every state—a national priority, with President Trump calling it the “civil rights statement of the year, of the decade, and probably beyond,” and arguing that zip codes should never determine a child’s future. States across the South, like Louisiana, are delivering. Louisiana has shown tremendous leadership in enacting the GATOR Scholarship Program and



making a promise to all Louisiana families who want educational freedom. Fully funding GATOR is how the Legislature keeps that promise. This year's funding proposal is a bold step in that direction, and AFPI urges this committee to do all it can to provide the increased funding for the GATOR Program. We are confident this will ensure the brightest future and greatest opportunities for every child in the state of Louisiana. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

