

# EDUCATION

## Voucher reform moves to state arenas

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Now that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that vouchers for students who attend religious schools are constitutional, the debate is moving back to the states — and into cyberspace.

Catholic Online, at [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org), has launched Catholic Families for School Choice, a movement to collect more than 1 million names to petition every state legislature to pass school voucher laws.

Michael Galloway, founder and president of Catholic Online, said the Supreme Court's June 27 decision in *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, upholding Cleveland's school voucher program, "has great potential implications but presents only an opportunity."

"It will take a new and effective form of Catholic action to translate that opportunity into a reality," added Galloway, whose Web site claims to receive more than 100,000 visitors each day.

The real work for vouchers will take place in the states, especially in more than 30 states that have "Blaine amendments" in their constitutions forbidding the use of public funds for "sectarian" schools.

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which filed the brief in the Cleveland case, says the legal term "sectarian" was "a code word for 'Catholic,' a still-harmful vestige of the late 19th-century nativism giving rise to the Blaine amendments."

The amendments are named for Rep. James Blaine of Maine, who tried unsuccessfully to add such wording to the U.S. Constitution in 1875.

Maureen Huntington, superintendent



Martin Lueders/CNS

Christine Suma of Cleveland, center, speaks at the National Parent Rally for School Choice in front of the Supreme Court building in Washington Feb. 20.

of Catholic schools in the San Francisco Archdiocese, said passage of a California voucher plan is not imminent, since the governor and teachers' unions claim that voters are not interested. In other parts of the country, she said, "the door is open."

Huntington has seen vouchers in action in Florida, where she served as superintendent of Catholic schools for the Diocese of Orlando. "Upper middle-class parents have always been able to choose," she said, either by paying tuition or moving to districts with good schools. Poor families did not have either choice, and now "the road has been cleared," she said.

Pennsylvania state Rep. William F. Adolph called the Zelman decision "a ma-

major victory for all supporters of school choice" and said he would introduce voucher legislation soon in Harrisburg.

Although teachers' unions have been among the strong opponents of voucher proposals, Rita Schwartz, president of the Philadelphia-based Local 1776, Association of Catholic School Teachers, called the Zelman decision "the best birthday present I've ever received." She added, "This is not a church-state issue, it's a justice issue. People with money have always had school choice. Many of our people did not."

Contributing to this story were Kamille Nixon in San Francisco and Lou Baldwin in Philadelphia.

## Fla. vouchers struck down

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the Florida voucher program is constitutional, but the program was struck down by a state judge striking down Florida's voucher law.

"We were caught off guard," said Michael McCarron, who heads the public relations office of Florida's Bishop. "In view of the Supreme Court's decision, we were not prepared to litigate the case."

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush signed the law in 2001, but it was struck down by a state judge in 2002. The judge's decision was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Florida voucher law was challenged by the state's teachers union, the Florida Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Florida branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the state's League of Women Voters.

McCarron told Catholic News Service Aug. 6 the Florida Catholic Conference has long supported the program "from a social-justice position."

He said the conference had been confident the program would continue based on the U.S. Supreme Court decision June 27 that Cleveland's program did not violate the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush supports the voucher program. On Aug. 6 the state filed an appeal of the judge's ruling. The appeal automatically allows the voucher students already enrolled in the program to remain until another court decision is handed down.

said Larry Keough, associate director for education at the Florida Catholic Conference.

He called the judge's ruling a "temporary setback," and said his primary concern was for those children already using the vouchers.

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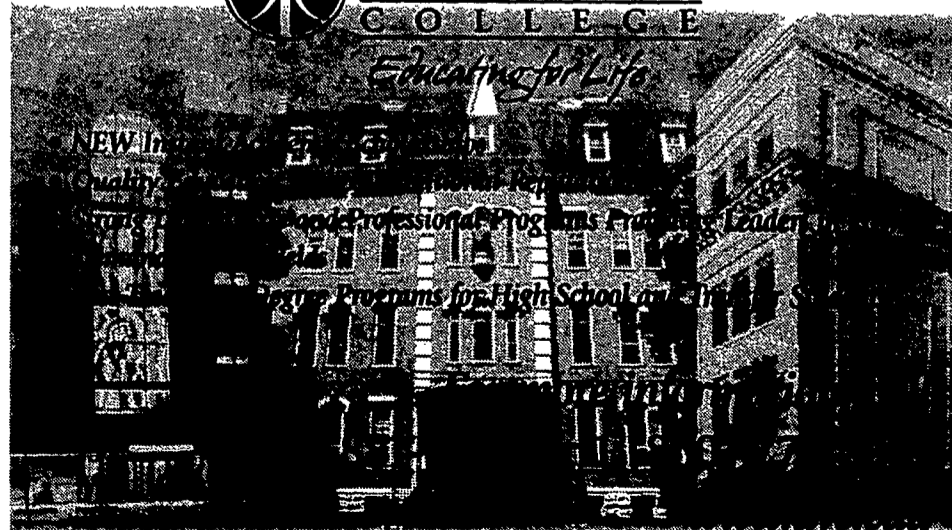
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