

Linda Hunt Williams: House District 37 Wake County

“What would families do if faced with the same choice? They would spend within their means.” – Linda Hunt Williams (*News & Observer*, 7/12/01)

Real Facts NC’s legislator profile series continues to examine key North Carolina legislators. This time we look at freshman Representative Linda Hunt Williams, going back to her days as a school choice advocate in Charlotte and as Deputy Director of Citizens for a Sound Economy. Williams was an early advocate for private school vouchers, spending state money to send kids to private schools. She was also an original “tea partier” advocating for less government and fewer taxes while working for the Koch-funded N.C. Citizens for a Sound Economy.

Summary:

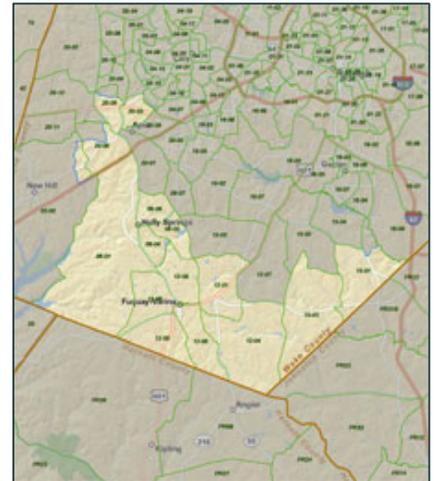
Williams has always been a proponent of charter schools and vouchers, but voted to weaken N.C. public schools

- She promised to improve schools if elected, but instead sponsored a bill that even NACSA, a national charter school advocacy group, advised against.
- H779 would allow charter schools to grow by 30 percent before changing their charter, would allow students enrolled in any NC charter school to receive priority enrollment at another charter school, would disaggregate performance data, and would allow charter schools to operate Pre-K programs with state funds.
- Williams voted for the 2017 Republican budget that shortchanged teachers and allocated \$45 million to the controversial school voucher program, despite promises to improve education as a member of the General Assembly.

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- Williams has a history of advocating for conservative causes and was an original “tea partier” who organized Koch-funded protests at the NC General Assembly demanding fewer taxes and less government
- Williams was the Deputy Director of N.C. Citizens for a Sound Economy between 2001 and 2002. During that time, the group unsuccessfully sued Gov. Mike Easley, faced criticism for lobbying for dropping antitrust action against Microsoft after accepting contributions from Microsoft, and protested at the General Assembly.
- Williams’ support of the 2017 Republican budget highlights the hypocrisy of these groups. The budget cut taxes for corporations, but failed to re-establish the childcare income tax credit that would have helped over 200,000 families.

NC House District 37



Rep. Linda Hunt Williams



Williams has always been a proponent of charter schools and vouchers, but voted to weaken NC public schools

Williams has a history of pushing private school vouchers and charter schools. She promised to improve schools if elected, but instead sponsored a charter school bill that even a national charter school advocacy group advised against.

Williams was honored at the 2000 GOP convention for her work with sending “needy” children to private schools. “Charlottean Linda Hunt Williams was among those honored by the GOP Tuesday as a “Local Hero.” Like former President Bush’s “Points of Light,” the award spotlights community involvement. Williams directs the Children’s Scholarship Fund-Charlotte, a group that pays for needy children to attend private or parochial school. Williams says more than 500 Charlotte-area students have received the scholarships.” (Charlotte Observer, 8/2/00)

- **The Children’s Scholarship Fund is supported in part by Walmart heir John Walton.** “Several hundred Mecklenburg K-8 students will move from public to private or parochial schools as part of a nation-wide scholarship lottery. The Children’s Scholarship Fund was set up last year by investor Theodore Forstmann who, with Wal-Mart heir John Walton, pledged \$100 million. The money is used to match funds from local CSF groups. [...] Linda Hunt Williams, who heads the local fund, said the scholarships will give underprivileged kids education options. “If a low-income family in this community wants to send their children to a private or parochial school, there’s nowhere they can turn. This fund fills the gap.” She thinks one of the best things about the award is that when a family’s name gets picked for a scholarship, every child in the family, kindergarten through eighth grade, will get a four-year scholarship.” (Charlotte Observer, 4/22/99)

Williams said she planned to work on education, keep District 37’s economy strong in the legislature. “The town already has received four applicants interested in the seat. Traditionally, Sears said, the person selected to fill a seat on the council comes from the town’s planning board. “But that’s not absolute,” he said. In Williams’ new seat at the state level, she said she plans to work on education and keeping the economy strong. “The whole area here in District 37 is just an award-winning area,” she said.” (News & Observer, 11/11/16)

Williams introduced House Bill 779 during the 2017 legislative session, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers said the bill would weaken oversight for charters, allow for growth without financial oversight. “Fenton also compared the sweeping new growth concessions of House Bill 779 to a business loan that binds the bank to provide additional funds to an applicant even if they do not meet the goals or the terms of their previous loan. “It’s not that (charters) shouldn’t be allowed to expand,” says Fenton. “But you would sure want to review their financials to make sure that they’re actually meeting their terms.” The concerns are noteworthy because NACSA is a widely-respected coalition of school choice supporters that recommend guidelines for the best oversight practices in charter schools, an exploding sector of public education in North Carolina and many other states. In North Carolina, charters are publicly-funded, tuition-free schools operating with broad exceptions from state regulations on curriculum and staffing. They are also managed by non-profit boards of directors, rather than elected local school board members.” (NC Policy Watch, [5/3/17](#))

Williams dismissed NACSA’s concerns, citing long waitlists for charter schools. “However, one of the legislation’s sponsors, Wake County Republican Linda Hunt Williams, pointed to a growing waitlist for charter students today. In a January report, the state’s Office of Charter Schools counted more than 37,000 students waiting for entry to a charter. “This is to open the door for some of these schools,” said Williams, who dismissed NACSA’s concerns that the legislation will only weaken oversight for the state’s charters. “We have to trust the fact that the board of directors are doing what they can to accommodate those new students,” said Williams. Yet, while NACSA is not taking an official position on the bill, Fenton said the legislation flouts the national charter group’s recommended guidelines.” (NC Policy Watch, [5/3/17](#))

H779 would allow charter schools to grow by 30 percent before changing their charter, would allow students enrolled in any NC charter school to receive priority enrollment at another charter school, would disaggregate performance data, and would allow charter schools to operate Pre-K programs with state funds.

- **H779 would allow charter schools to grow by 30 percent before having to change their charter.** “SECTION 1.(b) G.S. 115C-217.7 is amended by adding a new subsection to read: “(b1) Enrollment growth of greater than thirty percent (30%) shall be considered a material revision of the charter for any charter school that is not identified as low-performing. The State Board may approve such additional enrollment growth of greater than thirty percent (30%) only if it finds all of the following: The actual enrollment of the charter school is within ten percent (10%) of its maximum authorized enrollment. The charter school has commitments for ninety percent (90%) of the requested maximum growth. The charter school meets generally accepted standards of fiscal management. The charter school is, at the time of the request for the enrollment increase, substantially in compliance with State law, federal law, the charter school's own bylaws, and the provisions set forth in its charter granted by the State Board.” (H779, Ref. to House Rules Com, [4/27/17](#))
- **H779 would allow students enrolled in any NC charter school to receive priority enrollment (like siblings of students and children of teachers).** “SECTION 2. G.S. 115C-218.45(f) reads as rewritten: The charter school may give enrollment priority to any of the following: [...] A student who was enrolled in another charter school in the State in the previous school year that does not offer the student's next grade level. A student who was enrolled in another charter school in the State in the previous school year that does not offer the student's next grade level and both of the charter schools have an enrollment articulation agreement to accept students or are governed by the same board of directors. A student who was enrolled in another charter school in the State in the previous school year.” (H779, Ref. to House Rules Com, [4/27/17](#))
- **H779 would require charter school performance data be reported based on the Education Value-Added Assessment System split by charter schools, virtual charter schools, and dropout prevention and recovery charter schools.** “The student performance data based on the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) for charter school students disaggregated by years of student enrollment on the basis of race, sex, grade level, ethnicity, free or reduced lunch status, and disability status in the charter school for the following categories:
 1. Charter schools.
 2. Virtual charter schools.
 3. Dropout prevention and recovery program charter schools.Best practices resulting from charter school operations. Other information the State Board considers appropriate.” Notwithstanding the requirements for disaggregated data, the report shall not include any personally identifiable student data, as defined in G.S. 115C-402.5.” (H779, Ref. to House Rules Com, [4/27/17](#))
- **H779 would allow charter schools to operate NC pre-K programs with state pre-k funds.** “Assist certain charter schools seeking to participate in the NC prekindergarten program in accordance with G.S. 115C-218.115. f. Other duties as assigned by the State Board.” (H779, Ref. to House Rules Com, [4/27/17](#))

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Many educators, including veterans of 25 years, will only see an increase of \$30 a month, merely a tank of gas. “The newly unveiled North Carolina state budget does include increases in teacher pay, but they are neither big nor dramatic. Many educators – including veterans who have devoted 25 years or more to our state’s children – will see an increase of \$30 a month. That amounts to little more than a tank of gas, which will hardly be enough to allow teachers to quit their second or third jobs.” (Charlotte Observer, Op-Ed, [6/21/17](#), S257, Vetoes [6/27/17](#), Senate Veto Override [6/27/17](#), House Veto Override [6/28/17](#))

Starting teacher pay remains at \$35,000 under the Republican budget. “Under the teacher pay plan, teachers with 17 to 24 years of experience would see some of the biggest raises. Starting teacher pay would remain at \$35,000, but teachers at most experience levels would get a raise.” (News & Observer, [7/1/17](#), S257, Vetoes [6/27/17](#), Senate Veto Override [6/27/17](#), House Veto Override [6/28/17](#))

Republican lawmakers did not include Gov. Cooper’s recommendation of a stipend to aid teachers with out-of-pocket expenses in the final budget proposal. “He also criticized lawmakers’ decision to omit his proposed stipend for teachers to help buy classroom supplies, a lack of funding for teaching assistants, school nurses and school counselors and shifting more money into the Opportunity Scholarships private school voucher program. “Teachers see through dishonest budget gimmicks,” Cooper said as he was surrounded by a group of teachers at the Executive Mansion.” (WRAL, [6/26/17](#))

- **Teachers across the country spent \$500 to \$1000 out-of-pocket for classroom supplies and job-related expenses last year.** (Gaston Gazette, [5/6/17](#))

Budget allocated \$45 million to the controversial voucher program and stipulates that the state will add \$10 million more to the program annually. “The budget gives \$45 million this year for the controversial voucher program which allows parents to send their children to private schools using taxpayer-funded scholarships. Cooper has strongly criticized the program, saying those schools lack accountability. The budget says the state will add \$10 million more to the voucher program annually, until it hits \$145 million in the 2027-28 school year.” (News & Observer, [8/8/17](#), S257, Vetoes [6/27/17](#), Senate Veto Override [6/27/17](#), House Veto Override [6/28/17](#))

Vouchers “siphon funds away from the underfunded public school system and sends those tax dollars to private schools without accountability and transparency measures.” “Proponents of school vouchers say that the program enables low-income families to opt out of failing public schools to attend private institutions that offer better educational environments. But critics of the program say that the vouchers siphon funds away from the underfunded public school system and sends those tax dollars to private schools without accountability and transparency measures that ensure students are indeed getting a better education. The Opportunity Scholarships law also fails to ensure that private schools receiving tax dollars do not discriminate against students on the basis of religion or sexual identity.” (WRAL, [1/27/17](#))

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Williams was a staffer for U.S. Sen. Lauch Faircloth. “A Republican member of the Holly Springs Town Council announced Thursday that she’ll run for Rep. Paul Stam’s N.C. House seat. Linda Hunt Williams has been on the town council for six years. She’s a U.S. Navy veteran who worked as a staffer for former U.S. Sen. Lauch Faircloth. (News & Observer, 11/05/15)

- Faircloth was a one-term Republican Senator from North Carolina who enjoyed the support of Jesse Helms' Congressional Club. (WRAL, [8/22/01](#))

Williams was the Deputy Director of N.C. Citizens for a Sound Economy between 2001 and 2002. During that time, the group unsuccessfully sued Gov. Mike Easley, faced criticism for lobbying for dropping antitrust action against Microsoft after accepting contributions from Microsoft, and protested at the General Assembly.

Citizens for a Sound Economy is run by a tobacco heir and two Koch family members. "Take Citizens for a Sound Economy, whose influential North Carolina chapter recently helped stymie an effort to get 12,850 acres of forest in Avery County designated as wilderness. CSE has also been helping spearhead opposition to stream buffers (which it maintains violate property rights). In addition, this self-proclaimed "grassroots" group pushed for North Carolina to withdraw from the multi-state lawsuit against Microsoft Corporation and lobbies Congress to approve President Bush's judicial appointees. CSE is run by Reynolds tobacco-fortune heir C. Boyden Gray and two members of the Koch family (one of the wealthiest in the U.S.)." (Mountain Xpress, 11/19/02)

Citizens for a Sound Economy filed a lawsuit against Gov. Mike Easley claiming he misused money for public service ads they called political. The suit was dismissed. "Republican gubernatorial candidate Richard Vinroot ran ads during the campaign claiming Easley "misused a million dollars of public money to pay for political ads." A conservative group, N.C. Citizens for a Sound Economy, filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Easley's use of the money, saying it violated a constitutional provision that all penalties go to the public schools. The lawsuit was dismissed by a Superior Court judge. State Auditor Ralph Campbell also looked into the expenditures but found no wrongdoing." (News & Observer, 2/23/02)

Citizens for a Sound Economy faced criticism for lobbying Attorney General Cooper to drop antitrust action against Microsoft after the company donated to the group. "Following the event, organization officials met with Attorney General Roy Cooper to lobby him to drop the state from those involved in the antitrust action against Microsoft. Citizens for a Sound Economy has faced criticism in the past for weighing in on the Microsoft debate after the software maker gave \$380,000 to the group's tax-exempt foundation." (Durham Herald-Sun, 6/6/01)

In 2001, Citizens for a Sound Economy and the John Locke Foundation teamed up for a tea party protest at the NCGA. "Determined to stop a tax hike, protesters gathered outside the Legislature on Tuesday to criticize a Democratic proposal to increase sales taxes and create a new upper income tax bracket. About 700 people showed up at the "Tar Heel Tea Party," some wearing tea bags attached to their lapel buttons. The event was organized by talk radio hosts in several cities across the state along with the conservative groups that included the John Locke Foundation and Citizens for a Sound Economy. Inside the Legislature, one protester was removed from the House gallery after he stood and attempted to address House Speaker Jim Black, D-Mecklenburg." (AP, 8/1/01)

- **Williams:** "The people of North Carolina are already taxed to death." "We're not going to back down one iota," said Linda Hunt Williams, deputy director of N.C. Citizens for a Sound Economy. "The people of North Carolina are already taxed to death." (Greensboro News & Record, 7/20/01)
- **Williams:** "What would families do if faced with the same choice? They would spend within their means." "Linda Hunt Williams, deputy director of N.C. Citizens for Sound Economy, said state lawmakers should constrain spending. 'What would families do if faced with the same choice?' she asked. 'They would spend within their means.'" (News & Observer, 7/12/01)

Williams' support of the 2017 Republican budget highlights the hypocrisy of these groups. The budget cut taxes for corporations, but failed to re-establish the childcare income tax credit that would have helped over 200,000 families.

Budget favors tax cuts for the wealthy, lowering the corporate income tax rate to 2.5 percent from 3 percent. It will also lower the corporate income tax rate to 2.5 percent from 3 percent. “We are providing tax relief for middle class working families and businesses, and we’re doing it in a prudent way,” Dollar said.” (News & Observer, [6/28/17](#))

As of January 2017, NC’s corporate income tax is the lowest in the nation according to the Tax Foundation. “The state’s corporate income tax has dropped from 6.9 percent to 3 percent over the past four years, giving North Carolina the lowest corporate income tax rate of any state that levies the tax, according to the foundation.” (Economic Development Partnership of NC, [1/4/17](#))

Governor Cooper’s budget calls for the reinstatement of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, which could help more than 200,000 families pay for child care. (Governor’s Office Press Release, [6/1/17](#))

The Republican House & Senate budgets do not provide a child care tax credit. (Governor’s Office Press Release, [6/1/17](#))

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