



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success

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Testimony before the
House Education Committee
on
HB 2174

by

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Chair Highland, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2174**.

KASB opposes the low income students scholarship program act created last year by HB 2506 for three reasons.

First, we believe it violates the spirit, if not the letter, of the provision in the Kansas Constitution that says: “No religious sect or sects shall control any part of the public educational funds.” (Article 6, Section 6, subsection c.) The tax credits provided by this program clearly redirect public funds from the state to scholarship granting organizations, are clearly for an education purpose, and clearly reduce revenue available for other educational purposes. Because these scholarship may be used at religious schools controlled by churches or for religious purposes, this amounts to public tax dollars support sectarian religion.

Second, KASB has adopted this position: “Any school receiving public funding benefits must meet state accreditation requirements, provide information about students and financing on the same basis as public schools, and accept all students on an equal, non-selective basis.” This program does not limited to accredited private schools, and participating schools are not required to provide any information on the academic progress of students or how these funds are used, and not required to accept all students. As the result, this “school choice” program leaves the choice to the school, not the students and parents, and does not require that parents be provided information to allow an informed choice to be made.

Third, this program could reduce state revenues by up to \$10 million. That amount is two-thirds of the money swept from the KEY fund. It’s over one-third of the money that is being cut to schools under the Governor’s allotment plan. It’s just shy of one-fourth of the KPERS underpayment the Governor used to make it through FY 15. These choices do not even begin to address the revenue shortfall

facing the state next year. At a time when the Legislature will have to consider a range of incredible difficult choices to balance the budget and minimize cuts in public education funding next year that have already started this year, why begin cutting taxes even more for a program that hasn't started and has no academic or financial performance indicators?

We believe this program should be ended or at the very least delayed until the state budget is brought back to sound footing. However, if the committee does believe this program should continue, we suggest that the program need to be amended substantially. We suggest the following:

- First, these funds should not be allowed to support religious instruction.
- Second, these funds should not be allowed to pay for more than the documented cost of education.
- Third, to provide transparency and accountability, any schools receiving these funds should be required to provide the same academic and financial reporting to the state as public schools.
- Fourth, participating schools should be required to accept any qualifying student that applies. If receiving public funding, these schools should meet the needs of the students, not select students that meet the needs of the schools.

Thank you for your consideration.