

Dr. Marvin J. Miller

Friday, 29 January 2016

RE: Written Testimony on House Bill 2457

Dear members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for serving each student in Kansas. My perspective is unique. As a business person who then entered ACSI Christian school administration, I appreciate the efforts of parents who sacrifice time and money to obtain religious integrated instruction. As a parent of a child with substantial disabilities, I also understand the necessity of well-funded public instruction and special education. In my current service as a rural church pastor, I see firsthand the excellent efforts that local school districts undertake within their communities.

Yes, I do believe in school choice... *but not at the expense of local public school budgets*. Many private school administrators understand a partnering relationship with local public schools is precisely what builds local communities, drives civic engagement, and creates a well trained workforce.

The ongoing Kansas budget crisis alone should be a strong reason to reject this bill calling for increased corporate tax credits. If anyone deserves credits, it is hard working parents!

Yet there is a stronger reason to reject this bill. It has no provisions to ensure that scholarship monies be applied without discrimination, particularly to those with intellectual and physical disabilities. As the former President of the National Association of Christians in Special Education and current President of the Council of Exceptional Children's (CEC) caucus on Faith Based Schools, I have advocated that private schools develop robust special education programs and accept all students who apply as an integral part of their ethical mission. A number of private schools are currently doing this around the country.

The reality is that almost all private schools will reject admission for students who require extra time and supports – insisting that is the financial responsibility of the local school district. If a private school accepts any scholarship funds driven from these tax credits, they should be required to provide all appropriate special education services for each student who applies, either in house or through an inter-local agreement

With the continued drain of funds away from the local schools, these policies are causing irreparably harm to a generation of students with special needs. With the current Kansas budget only funding 80% of the special education excess costs, far lower than the 92% pledged under current law and much lower than 100% as it should be, this is not the time to expand corporate tax credits.

I would love to have a detailed conversation in order to find ways to legitimately provide parents with options to afford religious schooling – but only after funding for public education is restored and special education is fully funded. Kansas can only be great again when we work together for EACH student.

*I urge you to please **OPPOSE HB 2457**.*

Regards,

Pastor Marvin

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this letter are mine and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any agency or organization with which I am associated.