

Written only testimony for the House Education Committee
HB 2457 – Amending the tax credit for low income students’ scholarship program act

by

Gail Jamison, Parent, Goddard Public School District 265

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2457. I stand in opposition to this bill** which seeks expansion of the tax credit for the low income students’ scholarship program act.

As an introduction, I am a parent in the Goddard School district. Our public schools educate nearly 5700 students. Due to a strong commitment to educational excellence and student success, the district has experienced over 31 years of continuous growth. Parents are supportive partners with our dedicated and effective educators. I have had children enrolled in the district for the last 20 years. Like many parents, I volunteer in our district. My service includes years as a classroom volunteer to past president of our board of education. Currently I’m a Goddard Education Foundation Trustee, and the Goddard Advocates for Public Education coordinator.

I am mindful of the tremendous responsibility you carry to ensure the proper vetting of legislation brought before your committee as you consider its impact on Kansas public school students. I will address several points relating to fiscal impact, accountability and transparency of HB 2457 for your consideration.

I object to this program which creatively provides for the diversion of taxpayer funds into private schools. The increase of the tax credit from 70% to 100%, now for individuals as well as corporations, effectively translates to decreased dollars which will no longer be available to support our State’s General Fund. With a questionable tax cut policy, lowered and missed revenue projections impacting funding to core governmental responsibilities, I am concerned about this expansion of the tax credit.

I also oppose increasing the annual cap from \$10 million to \$12.5 million, again which translates to the expansion of contributions to support private schools. While the wording and maneuvering provided by the bill avoids direct funding to religious institutions, it remains a fact in the KSDE 2015 and 2016 legislative reports that the majority of funds are being channeled through scholarship granting organizations for religious schools. I strongly believe that public dollars should be used for public schools.

At a time when I hear much from our elected officials about student success and public schools accountability, I wonder why accountability is missing in this legislation. The lack of accountability begins with the guideline for a **“Qualified”** school, defined simply as, **“any non-public school in Kansas”**. No standards are required for the “qualified school” and there is no academic accountability for the students attending those schools on these “scholarships”. **Even the ALEC Model Legislation for tax credit scholarships recommends Academic Accountability for students and provides specific guidelines. ALEC warns “insufficient accountability regulation can produce situations that undermine public and legislative support for the program.”**

I view the expansion of the tax credit scholarship program as an increase in the diversion of funds away from public schools. Additionally, the lack of academic accountability for the students and transparency for the program is equally concerning. I urge you to oppose the expansion of this program.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments in opposition to HB 2457.