



Oral opponent testimony on
SB 437
KEEP Act
By
Leah Fliter
Assistant Executive Director of Advocacy
Kansas Association of School Boards
Lfliter@kasb.org
In
Senate Education
Feb. 14, 2024

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

KASB appears today in opposition to SB 437.

We believe the bill is well-intentioned but would request some substantive amendments if the committee decides to work the bill.

Our member-affirmed legislative policy states that, "To ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed, all schools supported by public funds must serve all children on the same basis as public schools. We oppose programs including but not limited to vouchers, education savings accounts and tuition tax credits because such programs divert public funding from public education to schools which are not required to serve all students, including those who are disadvantaged, disabled, or those with the greatest needs."

Proposing \$100 million in funding to assist students with the payment of educational expenses is certainly laudable. We're concerned, however, that SB 437 does not clearly state how one applies for the grants/vouchers, the deadline, or if there are any criteria associated with awarding the grants. The bill doesn't appear to set up a system of reimbursement for qualified expenses subject to receipts, but rather seems to set up an honor system that's not subject to enforcement or oversight.

Unfortunately, we have seen unregulated vouchers lead to widespread fraud in other states. In Arizona, for example, unregulated vouchers have been misused to buy theme park tickets, Disney+ subscriptions, kayaks, \$750 espresso machines, bounce houses, and more. We would ask the committee to address this oversight piece before working the bill.

Additionally, Section G on page 2 gives us serious concerns. It appears to indicate that \$100 million in general fund taxpayer dollars could be allocated to nonpublic schools as well as public schools. We strongly urge the committee to insert language noting that such appropriation of public tax dollars may only be made for expenses association with a public-school education. In the absence of such an amendment, KASB will oppose the bill on the grounds that it sets up a voucher system that harms public schools.

Kansas Association of School Boards

1420 SW Arrowhead Rd, Topeka, KS 66604 • 785-273-3600 • www.kasb.org

We appreciate that SB 437 appears to be designed to assist students and families with educational fees. We acknowledge that all Kansans are grappling with increased costs of living and of doing business.

We cannot support, however, the potential unregulated appropriation of \$100 million in taxpayer funds to nonpublic schools. Unfortunately, the bill as currently written cannot assure the legislature and Kansas taxpayers that the funds would be used for the bill's intended purposes. We would respectfully suggest that funding could instead be allocated to increasing Special Education funding or ensuring continuing inflationary adjustments to BASE state aid.

Thank you.

KASB is a non-profit service organization built on an abiding belief in Kansas public schools. We have put the needs of students and K-12 leaders first since 1917.