

Testimony to the House Education Committee
Opponent, Written-only
House Bill 2136
Expansion of Tax Credit Scholarship Program

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by

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee;

I am a Kansas resident and proud parent of three public school graduates. I am writing today because I believe this committee should stay focused on ensuring that Kansas public schools – which must welcome and serve every Kansas child – remain the focus of this committee. I am opposed to this bill and any other that seeks to harm children and financially undermine public schools as this one does.

There Is Harm

Fiscal Harm

There are some who say that because this program doesn't take money *directly* away from the General Fund or because it is money that the state *never received* in the first place it is somehow not taking money away from the state so there is no fiscal harm. This is a particularly cynical and self-serving view which deliberately ignores the fact that tax credits are a significant reduction in a tax bill and therefore a significant reduction in state revenue that would otherwise be received and spent on public education and other services.

Harm to Children

Voucher programs encourage the dismantling of public education by bribing Kansans with tax relief to remove their children from public schools and place them in private schools. Our Kansas public schools are publicly accountable and have layers of oversight to ensure children are safe and that they receive a fact-based, dogma-free, quality education. Private schools in Kansas, on the other hand

- are not subject to public oversight
- can have bigoted and discriminatory selection processes
- can teach objectively false information
- may promote religious dogma
- may be staffed by unqualified persons.

Allowing millions in tax dollars to evaporate by offering tax credits to families for private school choices without any mechanism to ensure the selected private educations meet minimum state standards for curricula, educational progress, and safety is a dereliction of this committee's obligation to protect Kansas children and ensure all Kansas children receive a quality education.

Where Does the Costly Program End?

It strikes me that this year's version of the bill is larger than previous years' both is the credit percentage and the number of children eligible to participate. How big will we let this program get? This year's version increases the cap, increases the tax credit percentage to 100% and includes more categories of applicants. It is clear that growing the program is the plan, not solving a specific education problem. The more kids that qualify, the easier it is to justify raising the cap. While \$20 million may seem an expendable amount today, what is to keep the legislature from raising the cap to \$50 million or \$500 million? What happens when the cost of

this second, poorly regulated, education funding mechanism becomes a financial burden to the state? Will you cut the program or will you attack public education costs and strip even more from our public schools? Why do you want to create two competing education systems that results in both a funding and quality crisis? Arizona is a perfect example of how this will end – ballooning education costs, poorer educational outcomes, angry citizens.

Public schools are one of Kansas' strengths. If this committee sees room for improvement in Kansas public schools, then please work to make those improvements so all Kansas children can benefit and thrive. Do not continue this effort to strip schools of children and resources. Families wanting an educational experience outside the public schools should always have that option to do so. However, I urge you to remember **it is not the obligation of the state to fund or financially reward private choices** made in lieu of public services and to **vote NO on this bill**.