

Testimony to the House Committee on Education

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TITLE: Kansas Citizen

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BILL NUMBER: Bill HB 2136

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

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Chair Estes & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill number HB 2136 as someone who understands the value of our public schools to an educated society and to the vitality of our communities.

I am a product of the public school system and believe that the public schools make us better citizens and build a stronger community. The public school system gives every child a chance to learn and grow and receive an equal education to become thriving and contributing citizens of our communities and state.

I oppose this bill as there is no need for expansion when there are still hundreds of thousands of students still eligible under the current guidelines who are not utilizing scholarships. I also believe that expanding the program to private school students will only take opportunities from the very students the Tax Credit Scholarship program was intended to help. Instead of expanding, accountability should be added to the program to understand why these at-risk students aren't receiving scholarships.

Furthermore, increasing the tax credit to 100% provides special tax treatment to those who choose to donate through this program that funds private schools versus those who donate to other

nonprofits. The current tax credit of 75% already provides a lucrative benefit to those choosing to (and able) to funnel their tax dollars to private schools. Expanding the tax credit to 100% allows these taxpayers, especially the wealthy, to completely avoid paying taxes in the state Kansas. This will divert even more funds that could otherwise be used to improve public education to subsidize the private choices of some parents and allow donors to avoid paying taxes in Kansas. This program would just essentially be welfare for the wealthy.

Public tax dollars belong with public schools

Public tax dollars should remain with our public schools that accept and educate all children and that provide oversight for our tax dollars. We should not be expanding this program that already funnels tax payer dollars to private schools that lack oversight and are allowed to discriminate in admissions.

This bill takes money that could be used to strengthen our public schools that serve all children and gives it to families who have made a person choice to receive a religious or other non-public education.

Instead of providing tax credits to fund private schools, the legislature should be using those tax dollars to fully fund special education.

Private schools are not available to all, private schools get to choose who to accept.

We should not be reducing state revenues by providing tax credits that funnel money to private schools that can pick and choose which children they want to serve.

No oversight or accountability

Our tax dollars should not go to private schools that lack oversight, leaving the public uninformed as to whether or not our tax dollars are really being spent to improve the lives of children. Currently, there are no controls in place to ensure eligible at-risk students who apply for a scholarship are granted one, as private schools are allowed to set their own admission standards. Also, there are no controls in place to ensure those who do receive scholarships receive a quality education. Kansans expect accountability for our tax dollars.

Rural communities and students are harmed by voucher programs

Students in rural areas lack little to no private options, therefore rural students (and communities) are harmed as public school resources are drained.

The Tax Credit Scholarship program primarily benefits those in urban areas of our state. Rural taxpayers will end up subsidizing private school tuition for families in metro areas such as Johnson County, Wichita, and Topeka.

Please vote no on bill HB 2136.

Sherri Williams
Leavenworth, Kansas