

House Education Committee

Proponent Testimony for SB 87 with Amendments

By Linda Highland

Madam Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, Ranking Member Stogsdill, and Committee Members, thank you for this opportunity to testify as a proponent for SB 87. This bill amends the 2014 Tax Credit for Low Income Students Scholarship Program Act. It is time this program has a new name, the Kansas K-12 Students Scholarship Program Act, that focuses upon the scholarship opportunity that comes through charitable contributions and takes away the low-income stigma label. I humbly ask that you amend SB 87 and give it a new title since SB 87 no longer just serves low-income families.

Please amend SB 87 to be newly named “Kansas K-12 Students Scholarship Program Act,” with the administration moved from the KSDE to the State Treasurer, including a provision for the Treasurer to advertise the program. This move to administer the program at the State Treasurer’s office is the best fit for parents to learn about the program. The Treasurer and his staff are aware of this possible move. It is appropriate because their office holds other education savings programs and has the capability to advertise. Unlike where the program is administered with KSDE where parents would rarely find the information on their website, the Treasurer’s website is very user friendly. Currently, most often a school introduces the opportunity to parents whom they believe would qualify for the program. This leaves out parents who need help and have never heard of the program. It was never appropriate to ask KSDE to administer a program that helps students leave public schools. There needs to be a link and introduction to the program. That link is to the State Treasurer’s office.

High school students are discriminated against on entry into this program under SB 87. On numerous occasions high schoolers need to change schools due to unfortunate circumstances when they could have qualified for this program. This discrimination, and the discrimination with SB 87 that only certain families can enter the program without low-income qualifications, can be corrected with a third way to enter the program where all K-12 students in low performing schools are eligible to apply. **Please amend SB 87 that if a family resides in a district where 33% or fewer of the students in that district are scoring academically proficient, as reported in the district’s Accountability Report in levels 3 & 4 math, ELA, or science, their K-12 students qualify to enter the Kansas K-12 Students Scholarship Program.**

The thing I like best about this program is that the funds come, not from Kansas taxpayers, but from individuals who want to give scholarships to students. Individuals contributing to the Scholarship Granting Organizations would receive a tax credit, much the same as those who give to charitable organizations through their IRAs receive a tax credit for doing so.

This updated and improved legislation cannot help all students, but it will help more students to receive a scholarship and be given a new beginning to fulfill their unmet educational needs.

Thank you for your service. I ask for your support for SB 87.

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