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March 23, 2017

Testimony to House Education Committee

Chair, Representative Clay Aurand, Room 286-N

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OPPOSE (written only) — [HB 2374 Expanding Tax Credit Scholarship Program](#)

Hearing: Friday, March 23, 2017, 3:30 pm Room 546-S

Chair [Rep. Clay Aurand](#), Vice Chair [Rep. Diana Dierks](#), and Ranking Minority Member [Rep. Valdenia Winn](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB2374 – tax credit scholarship expansion. The Kansas PTA is **opposed to this bill**.

Kansas PTA still shares the same concerns noted in previous testimony beginning back in 2014, when the program was first established followed by two subsequent expansion bills. The legislative platform and priorities of the PTA clearly states that our membership “opposes the use of vouchers, scholarships or tax credits toward the tuition of non-public schools that can discriminate in admissions, provide sectarian religious instruction or compete under different rules than public schools” relating to transparency, testing, accreditation and budget information ([KS PTA Legislative Priority 6](#)).

Beyond these ethical and constitutional problems of inequity, empirical evidence warns against the implementation of such programs.

School vouchers are not a proven strategy for improving student achievement. Studies of U.S. and international voucher programs show that the risks to school systems outweigh insignificant gains in test scores and limited gains in graduation rates ([Economic Policy Institute, Carnoy 2017](#)).

Inherent problems with the proposed expansion and underlying program:

First, school choice vs parental choice. Tax credit scholarships/vouchers in reality give choice to private non-public schools, not parents. Private/non-public schools by definition can be selective about who they choose to admit and to reject. Regardless of whether an “eligible student” is redefined from being a free lunch eligible student attending a Title I school designated as a priority or focus school due to low performance, to whether the student is attending any public schools and is eligible for free or reduced lunch, low-performing/high needs youth living in poverty can still be denied admission in favor of high-performing/lower needs youth living in poverty.

Second, lack of accountability. Any non-public school providing education to elementary and secondary students is eligible for taxpayer scholarship funds. Yet, non-public schools are exempt from standards and accountability requirements ([KS Regulations 2015](#)). Public tax credits funds can be

awarded to un-accredited entities. Non-public private programs can opt out of state testing, nor are they required to publish test results and are legally allowed to withhold critical financial information. Scholarship receiving programs would not be required to adhere to legislative mandates like the proposed suicide prevention in-service for teachers or Celebrate Freedom Week curriculum, and other such directives. The Scholarship program has no comprehensive assessment of student achievement nor credible measure of its educational program impact to inform parents and tax payers. Furthermore, the state would be unable to assess the efficiency of these alternative choices in comparison to the public school districts, because comparable achievement and financial data is be unavailable. Further, the bill weakens parental accountability for making an informed choice by repealing public school attendance as a criteria for scholarship eligibility. And finally, the expansion allows for individual donors, creating a potential loophole for parents to contribute on behalf of each other's children and gain a 90% tax credit for each other's private school tuition.

Third, the bill is financially questionable. The legislature is in no financial position to be expanding tax credits when the state budget faces significant revenue shortfalls and public education is underfunded, particularly when similar programs perform no better than Kansas students and usually worse. In the 2016 tax year, the program awarded \$553,000 in tax credits. Since the beginning of the program there has been a \$1,096,200 in tax credits earned. Further, 18 percent of funds may be awarded to any student meeting the definition of eligible student regardless of prior enrollment in a public school. Thus, this public tax base is redirected before local K12 public schools even have a chance to provide those students with an opportunity to achieve the state education standards.

As a parent and taxpayer, it seems that the prudent course of action would be to re-dedicate state efforts on the existing public education infrastructure, to strengthen our centers of learning that welcome all Kansas youth, and to invest the resources required by our great Kansas educators to provide every child with the opportunity to achieve rigorous state education standard ([Gannon v State, 2017](#)). Kansas legislators have a constitutional obligation to provide equitable opportunity for all students to achieve, not just a select few.

On behalf of the parents, teachers, and patrons of the Kansas PTA, we oppose this bill and we thank you for your time and consideration.

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Cc: Josh Halperin, VP Advocacy; Devin Wilson, State Legislative Chair
Debbie Lawson, Mary Sinclair, PhD & Brian Hogsett, Team Advocates

THE PTA POSITION

Kansas PTA is a [nonpartisan](#) association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities.