

To whom it may concern:

I'm writing in support of Senate Bill 128 which would provide parents who pay for private school education a refundable tax credit equal to the state's base aid. I feel strongly about this bill because I have been both a student AND a teacher in both public and private schools.

As a child living in Shawnee, Kansas, I attended Broken Arrow Elementary School (a public school) from Kindergarten until the middle of third grade. I did not enjoy my time there. I felt bored and was not being challenged. I was typically placed with low achieving or struggling students for group projects and often felt like I was a second teacher. Socially, I only had one friend, and she was a "maybe" friend who would often shun me for no reason.

In the middle of my third-grade year, my mother was hired as an art teacher at Maranatha Christian Academy (a private school). Because of the discount offered to staff at the school, my family could then afford to send my brother and I to Maranatha. I remember my first day being absolutely shocked by how welcoming and kind the staff and children were. Everyone wanted to sit with me at lunch, so I had to make a schedule to include each person. I soon became friends with a girl named Stephanie Plummer. She is still one of my best friends 27 years later. I also remember being challenged by the curriculum instead of bored.

I attended Maranatha all the way through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and graduated with honors. I enjoyed the small classes, close friendships, and caring teachers as well as the extra-curricular opportunities at the school. I knew someday I wanted my own children to attend a private school that valued what I valued (my strong Christian faith and an attitude of kindness to all).

After graduating from Emporia State University in 2009 with a degree in Elementary Education, I was hired to teach at Emporia Christian School. I taught a combination 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class for two years. I enjoyed being able to teach what I believed in and pray with my students daily. When my husband was hired to teach in Junction City, we moved to Manhattan. I spent the following year as a paraprofessional in a large public school (Ware Elementary) on Fort Riley. This environment was a challenge compared to the private schools I had attended and worked in before. Some students were very disrespectful and some teachers spent all their time trying to curb behaviors. Some students were therefore neglected and not given enough instruction or support.

In 2012, my husband and I both got hired to teach in Hutchinson, Kansas, where we still reside. I was teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at McCandless Elementary School (a public school), and my husband was teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade science at Hutchinson Middle School. Throughout the time I was at McCandless, I experienced both an extremely unsupportive administration, extremely disrespectful students, and large amounts of extra requirements as a teacher at that school. One year I was so stressed, I developed shingles and almost quit with a month left in the school year. In the fall of 2014, I became pregnant with my first child and retired from teaching. I opened my licensed home daycare, Little Blessings Daycare, in August of 2015.

I enjoyed staying home with my son, and as his kindergarten year approached, my husband and I decided to send him to Central Christian School (a private school in Hutchinson). My son is now in second grade, and we are so grateful for Central Christian. We are so happy to have the choice to send him there. After knowing how public schools are run in my community, I would never put my children in

a public school. And since I run a daycare and cannot leave the house, homeschooling would not be fair to my children. I want them to be able to interact with peers their own age.

My son LOVES his school! He has wonderful teachers who really care about him. The staff and families are so supportive and kind and have pitched in to bring him home daily since I cannot leave the house to pick him up. He feels safe and happy at school. I never worry about what type of things he might be learning or seeing at school.

One struggle that we have and I know many families have, is the affordability of private education. Right now, my husband has a good job at Pfizer, and I have my income from my daycare. But I would love to move on to a job with more flexible hours. I miss all of my son's school events if they happen between 7 am and 5 pm. I cannot take off work to attend class parties, special programs, etc. My dream is to become a professional organizer by the time my 2 year old daughter is ready for kindergarten. But that will mean a loss in income as I build my client base, and double the tuition for the school. A tax credit would help so much! I know families who make too much money to qualify for scholarships but not enough money to send their children to CCS. Tuition discounts for large families don't start until the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> child.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I wish I could attend to testify in person in Topeka, but that's not possible with my current career. Feel free to reach out to me with any questions!

Sincerely,

Amanda Wilke