

February 6, 2023
Testimony to the House K-12 Budget Committee

NAME: Sarah Mackay

TITLE: Parent - Shawnee Mission School District, Leawood

EMAIL ADDRESS: sarahmackay28@gmail.com

BILL NUMBER: HB2218, Sunflower Education Savings Accounts

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Oral

Dear Chair & members of the committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill HB2218.

Dear Chairman & members of the committee, As the parent of two school age children, one attending a private catholic high school and the other attending public elementary school in the Shawnee Mission School District, I am writing to share my story and to voice my opposition to the creation of Education Savings Accounts that use public funds to subsidize private education. I ask that you oppose bill HB 2218. Public school funding per the Gannon court case is still being phased in and the state has yet to meet its special education funding obligation.

Before considering diverting public tax dollars to nonpublic schools, I would hope this committee would ensure the legislature fulfills its obligations to our public schools which are responsible for educating all Kansas children. Despite my opposition to HB 2218, I would like to thank the legislature for its commitment to putting our public schools on the path to being constitutionally funded.

My son Sawyer started having seizures at age 1. He had brain surgeries for the seizures at ages 2 and again at age 4. This started our family down a path that ended up with Sawyer needing Special Education services. Sawyer's second brain surgery caused damage to his frontal lobe. The brain damage and the seizures impact Sawyer's ability to regulate his emotions and he has a severe processing delay in taking in verbal information. 2 years ago – he was officially diagnosed with autism. He is also incredibly intelligent – taking 3rd in our school spelling bee last year.

I write this to say that I didn't envision us as a Special Education family. Sawyer just started receiving special education services last year in 5^h grade. This was the same year that Covid funding enabled our elementary school to have a full time social worker on hand to help him (and the teachers) with big emotional breakdowns. Increasing funding to enable social workers changed my son's life – and also changed the lives of his teachers to have support and the other students in the class to not be interrupted – as there was a trained safe person to work with Sawyer during breakdowns. Special Education funding is now critical to his daily life and quality of education and safety.

The proposed bill is meant to increase school choices. There is no better school or really no other school that fits Sawyer's needs. His major breakdowns would have him expelled at a private school. Taking away funding from our public schools with the proposed Saving Accounts will take away resources from kids like mine – resources they desperately need.

We started our older high school aged daughter in private Catholic high school last year after 10 years of public school. It was a good move for her and while it is a financial stretch for us, using public funding for this is NOT the answer. Properly funding public schools is the correct answer – and this will not be possible with the proposed bill.

My son doesn't have any options that fit his needs for private schools in the area. Private schools can be a wonderful option but should remain that, an option for those who choose to take on that financial decision. My choosing private school for our daughter has strengthened my commitment to knowing that public school needs to be held to a higher funding standard. We need to fund schools so that all children have access to what they need - in our case it was a social worker and then special education. Private school wouldn't work for Sawyer, even specialized schools. He and kids like him would not be able to benefit from an Education Savings Account and our tax dollars should be for the benefit all. This isn't just a financial decision for us, it is a belief and need for public schools to provide for all students. Public schools need to be properly funded to do this. Please do not jeopardize public school funding by using tax dollars to subsidize private schools through ESA's or other voucher mechanisms. Adequately funding public schools makes a crucial difference to many.

Again, I ask you to oppose bill HB 2218 Thank you for your consideration,

Sarah Mackay - Parent - Shawnee Mission School District, Leawood