

Testimony to the House Committee on Education

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TITLE: private 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,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my opposition to bill HB 2136. My reasons are many and I hope you will take the time to consider each of them.

Expansion continues to be unnecessary

The original intent of this program was to help low income (at-risk) kids attending the 100 lowest performing schools. Yet, with each expansion, more and more of the at-risk students get left behind as private schools have a bigger pool of students to choose from. The at-risk kids who would require more resources from private schools can be skipped over in favor of kids with fewer challenges.

There are more than 235,000 free and reduced lunch students eligible for the program and \$6 million in available scholarships. Please put your focus back on these students. Opening the program up to more students and allowing for an increase in the cap is not necessary.

Program lacks data and accountability

Any changes to the Tax Credit Scholarship program should include data collection and reporting requirements to increase accountability and transparency for Kansas tax dollars. Such as:

- Number of students who were eligible and applied for a scholarship vs. number of students utilizing a scholarship. We know private schools are allowed to deny admission for a host of reasons. Were some of these 235,000 at-risk students denied admission?
- Retention rates in the program by income level. Are at-risk students with more challenges returning to public school because they weren't finding success at a private school or because they were counseled out?
- Measures of success for students participating in the program by income level — standardized test scores, graduation rates, post-secondary success. Are we seeing the benefits from this program that were promised? Are there some private schools with lower performance? Should they remain in the program?

Kansans expect their tax dollars to be used effectively. If our tax dollars are being diverted to a private entity, we should expect some oversight and transparency.

100% tax credit is egregious, is tax avoidance, and benefits the wealthy & corporations

Kansans who make contributions to private schools should not receive preferential treatment over Kansans who donate to charitable organizations. The current 75% tax credit (which was expanded from 70%) is lucrative enough. A 100% tax credit allows taxpayers to essentially make donations for free and is pure tax avoidance. Considering the \$500,000 contribution limit (that can be carried forward to future years), the benefits to corporations and wealthy Kansans are immense and an expansion to 100% is egregious.

This increase would just incentivize more taxpayers to contribute to this program resulting in continued decreases to the state general fund that is used to fund our public schools and other public goods like our roads and bridges. All Kansans should be contributing to the good of our state.

Please vote no on HB 2136

This bill is simply a voucher program in disguise and one that is more egregious than most. Not only does it divert public tax dollars to private schools via these lucrative tax credits, but the benefits to wealthy Kansans outweigh the benefits to the students this program was intended to support. Choosing to send your child to a private school shouldn't be subsidized by the state and choosing to donate to a private school should not be subsidized by the state in a manner that is more beneficial than other charitable donations.

Thank you,

Erin Woods
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