

**NAME:** Marcel Harmon

**TITLE:** Private Citizen and former School Board Member / President (USD 497)

**EMAIL ADDRESS:** [marcelharmon@gmail.com](mailto:marcelharmon@gmail.com)

**BILL NUMBER:** HB 2136

**PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL:** Opponent

**ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY:** Written Only Testimony

**DATE OF HEARING:** February 5, 2025

Chair Estes and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to share my opponent testimony against HB 2136. My name is Marcel Harmon, and I am a voter in Douglas County. I am writing today to encourage the committee to vote no on HB 2136.

Both of my kids attended public school (USD 497) with the youngest graduating high school in 2023. I'm a former school board member of USD 497. I have volunteered on local and state education committees and task forces for a large portion of my adult life, and as a consultant have spent a significant amount of time in public schools for most of my professional career. My parents were both public school teachers (my mom was also a grade school librarian). I know the value of public education to the state of Kansas and its importance to the vitality of our communities.

I have grouped my opposition points into the following topics.

**Expansion of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program:**

- Why does the program need to be expanded when there are still hundreds of thousands of students still eligible under the current guidelines who are not utilizing scholarships?
- Expanding the program to private school students will only take opportunities from the very students the Tax Credit Scholarship program was intended to help. *Instead of expanding, accountability should be added to the program to understand why these at-risk students aren't receiving scholarships.*

- Increasing the tax credit to 100%, by providing special tax treatment to the donors of this program, provides a greater incentive to funding private schools versus donating to other very worthy nonprofits. They should all be on an equal playing field relative to tax incentives.
- The current tax credit of 75% already is already a huge benefit to those choosing to funnel their tax dollars to private schools. Expanding the tax credit to 100% *allows these taxpayers, especially the wealthy, to completely avoid paying taxes in the state of Kansas.*

**Public tax dollars belong with public schools:**

- Public tax dollars should remain with our public schools primarily because a) they accept and educate ALL children (private schools can pick and choose which children they want to serve) and b) they are accountable to the taxpayers. Accountability is a critical part of spending public dollars, as many conservative legislators are fond of pointing out. Private and homeschoools lack the oversight necessary to confirm whether or not our tax dollars are really being spent to improve the lives of children.
- Expanding the Tax Credit Scholarship Program will divert even more funds from public education to subsidize private education, have the same negative impact as a voucher program. This diversion of funds harms public education along with the students served by public schools. This can be particularly harmful for our rural communities as their resources are drained, with little to no private options available. Rural taxpayers will end up subsidizing private school tuition for urban families.
- Instead of providing tax credits to Kansans who choose not to send their kids to public school, the legislature should be using those tax dollars to fully fund special education (currently underfunded by \$173 million).
- Families with children with special needs, disabilities, or those for whom English is not their first language will not benefit from this tax credit expansion as few private schools can accommodate their needs. And taking money away from public schools will make it harder for them to adequately meet the needs of these families and their students. This is extremely inequitable, negatively impacting many of those already struggling the most.

### **Vouchers are welfare for the wealthy:**

- Vouchers, tax credit scholarships, etc., take money that could be used to strengthen our public schools that serve all kids and gives it to families who have made a private choice to receive a religious or other non-public education, many who can easily afford that choice. This program already allows for tax avoidance, especially for wealthy donors. Expanding the tax credit to 100% is even more egregious. *The Tax Credit Scholarship program, like most voucher programs, is welfare for the wealthy.*

### **Public schools are a public good:**

- A strong public education system benefits ALL of society, not just the individual students who make use of it. This is because public schools are a public service – a common pool resource – providing good quality education to EVERYONE, regardless of socio-economic status. A strong public education system ensures we have citizenry capable of maintaining our communities and society as a whole. The potential consequences of diverting public tax dollars to those who choose to homeschool or send their kids to private school undermines the state's ability to fund our public schools, potentially leaving an underfunded public school system and putting this critical common pool resource at risk.
- Each successive generation can also be viewed as a common pool resource because the continuity, success, and vitality of our communities, economies, and institutions depends on the success of each generation of students and our ability to educate and prepare them for the world. Because private schools can choose to admit only the best and brightest students, leaving other children behind in the process, they take away from that common pool resource society depends on.

### **Relevant Sources of Information**

The following are some relevant sources of information:

- [State and local experience proves school vouchers are a failed policy that must be opposed: https://www.epi.org/blog/state-and-local-experience-proves-school-vouchers-are-a-failed-policy-that-must-be-opposed-as-voucher-expansion-bills-gain-momentum-look-to-public-school-advocates-for-guidance/](https://www.epi.org/blog/state-and-local-experience-proves-school-vouchers-are-a-failed-policy-that-must-be-opposed-as-voucher-expansion-bills-gain-momentum-look-to-public-school-advocates-for-guidance/)

- [State Policymakers Should Reject K-12 School Voucher Plans:](https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/state-policymakers-should-reject-k-12-school-voucher-plans)  
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/state-policymakers-should-reject-k-12-school-voucher-plans>
- [School Vouchers: A Survey of the Economics Literature:](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jel.20150679)  
<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jel.20150679>
- [Summary of Research on School Vouchers:](https://education.indiana.edu/research/centers/ceep/education-policy/policy-briefs/2023/research-on-school-vouchers.html)  
<https://education.indiana.edu/research/centers/ceep/education-policy/policy-briefs/2023/research-on-school-vouchers.html>
- [Public dollars should fund public schools](https://www.ncpecoalition.org/) (from the National Coalition for Public Education): <https://www.ncpecoalition.org/>
- [Private School Choice: What the Research Says:](https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/private-school-choice-what-the-research-says/2024/10) <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/private-school-choice-what-the-research-says/2024/10>

Once again, I thank you all for reviewing my thoughts on this bill, and I encourage you all to vote no on the passage of HB 2136 out of committee.