

Testimony to the House Committee on Education

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TITLE: Kansas Citizen, Parent of Kansas Educator

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BILL NUMBER: Bill HB 2136

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only Testimony

DATE OF HEARING: February 5, 2025

Chair Estes & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill number HB 2136.

I am a lifelong Kansan, having graduated from a rural Kansas high school and the University of Kansas. We raised our daughter in the Shawnee Mission School District, and she now teaches in the Turner School District.

I believe one of the best traits of our state historically has been our focus on quality public education. This was universally true across the state. Public education was important to my grandparents, to my parents who were educators, to my husband and I and to our children, who are all educators. Strong public schools are critical to the ongoing maintenance of high-quality communities where people want to live and work.

I am vehemently opposed to SB 75 and voucher programs in general. First and foremost, public tax dollars should remain with our public schools that accept and educate all children and that are accountable to taxpayers. Education Tax Credits divert funds that could otherwise be used to improve public education to subsidize the private choices of some parents thus having the same negative impact as a voucher program. This bill takes 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. 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** that is currently underfunded by \$173 million. Tax credits for private education are another way for wealthy families to reduce their tax burden and avoid paying their fair share.

Second, private schools are not required to accept all students. Public dollars should provide funding to schools who will accept any child, not those that can pick and choose which families they want to serve. Families with children with special needs, disabilities, or those for whom English is not their first language will not benefit from these tax credits as few private schools can accommodate their needs.

Finally, public schools are critical to the development of healthy communities in our state. Public schools are a public service and paid for by everyone, regardless of whether they use them or not. Just as we would not give a tax rebate to people who buy books instead of using a

public library or who own private vacation homes instead of camping in national parks, the government should not refund private school tuition to parents who choose not to send their children to public schools. A strong public education system provides benefits to the entire society, not just the individual students. 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. In addition, there is a significant risk that some children may not receive adequate education if parents or guardians seek to receive the tax credit and yet provide little or no education in exchange. The lack of accountability for education provided for private or home schools makes this a real risk to Kansas students.

Again, I ask that you vote NO on SB75 for the sake of maintaining strong Kansas public schools, fully funded, accountable and available to all children.

Sincerely,
Melinda Parks, Lenexa, KS