

Testimony before the  
House Education Committee  
On  
HB 2374 – Relating to the Tax Credit for Low Income  
Students Scholarship Program Act  
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Thank you Chair Aurand and members of the committee for allowing me the opportunity to offer my input on HB 2374.

I stand opposed to the bill and urge the committee to not only ignore these recommendations, but rather, in their place, use the language from HB 2252, which over a period of several years repeals the tax credit scholarship program and closes the door once and for all on this misguided attempt to “reform” public education through the use of vouchers.

Before I share with you more details of my concerns, please let me introduce myself.

I am Tom Krebs, a resident of Topeka and a patron of USD 501. I know many of you, but for those of you I have not met, let me share a bit of background.

I am a former teacher, administrator, and school board member. I also was employed by KASB for sixteen years, half of those as a lobbyist, and the other half working with boards and administrators to improve instruction, staff evaluation and school climate and culture. I retired from KASB last summer.

I stand before you today as a public school advocate with no official constituency but with a passion for helping students become the best they can be. And in that capacity, I bring a perspective that no other conferee or committee member at this hearing has and that is of one who was with real kids and teachers in classrooms three days last week. You see, since school started last fall, I have volunteered in a 501 middle

school 3-4 days a week, 2-3 hours a day. I spend time in the band room, a literacy support classroom and an after-school music program.

It has been an amazing opportunity.

Some basic demographic facts my building: 94 percent of its students in the free- or reduced lunch program and 21 percent had IEPs, a third more than the state average.

The student body is about 40 percent African-American, one-third Hispanic and the remainder white/other.

I work with and watch dedicated professionals teach children every day that don't bring their A game to school on a regular basis, and for many, their home life is not one that really supports a conscientious and eager-to-learn student.

I watch too few administrators and others get called to classrooms to support faculty as needed due to unacceptable student behavior. I see them in the office working with students and families, which is often the next step after that original intervention.

But even with all those challenges, I get to see students grow every day: as musicians, scholars, leaders and human beings, physically, emotionally and socially.

But with all that success, more support and resources are needed. Simply put, I see kids every day that need more access to psychologists, social workers, counselors, smaller instructional settings, and access to after-school transportation. Essentially, these students need and deserve every dime Kansas taxpayers can generate to help them become productive, fulfilled and conscientious adults.

And vouchers and neo-vouchers, as proposed in this bill, are not the road that will get them there.

Why do I believe that?

One, school choice is not about families picking schools, it's about schools picking their students. I come in contact every day with students who would not last a month, much less a semester at a private school. Those schools want to deliver to their parents/customers a climate devoid of conflict, disruption and disengagement. They want top athletes and scholars, artisans and Thespians. They'll keep the ones they want and send the others back to public school or won't accept them from the get-go. They have every right to that process, but it should not be supported by ONE single penny of the public's money, as they aren't doing the public's work.

The second point is the manner in which the program was created. The program HB 2473 is trying to expand was the result of legislative manipulation and backroom deals and not in a transparent manner that reflected the real will of both chambers. You see, the scholarship program, originally in Hs Sub for SB 22, failed in a division vote on the House floor, 56-63 in 2013. It was amended into HB 2506 in 2014 during a debate in the Senate. There were no Senate hearings on the bill. The inclusion was performed at the urging of a former House Ed chair that was not returned to Topeka for this session. Three other vocal supporters from the Ed committee also lost their bid to return this session. The whole program was passed in the House late at night packaged with many other bills; House members that voted the bill down once were not given a second opportunity to judge the worth of the program on its own merits. And even with that kind of pressure, it passed in the House with the bare minimum necessary, 63 votes.

Please look at HB 2252 for guidance in this policy area, not HB 2374. The students I work with, and in public schools across the state, deserve your support in this crucial discussion.