

February 14, 2019

Written Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams

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Room 286-N, State Capitol Building

Oppose House Bill 2150 – Enacting the Kansas hope scholarship act – bullying voucher bill.

Hearing: Thursday, February 14, 2019, 3:30 PM Room 546-S

Honorable Chairman Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 2150. The Kansas Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is a non-partisan, volunteer organization, whose mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Our members vote annually to approve a legislative platform that is used guide our interactions with the work of federal, state and local policymakers.

We strongly oppose any scholarship, voucher-type bills. Kansas PTA still shares the same concerns expressed in 2014, when we first testified in opposition to this program. The legislative platform and priorities of the PTA clearly states that our membership “opposes the use of vouchers, scholarships, or tax credits toward the tuition of non-public schools, with the authority to discriminate in admissions, provide sectarian religious instruction and operate under different rules of transparency and accountability than public schools” (KS PTA Legislative Priority 4).¹ Ethically, constitutionally, empirically – vouchers and voucher-type programs are a problematic response to the school finance issue of adequacy.

The Network for Public Education and education historian Diane Ravitch has reported that “privatization advocates have created tax credit programs because school vouchers are unpopular. These programs are a way to get around prohibitions against using public dollars for religious schools which often discriminate on the basis of religion, gender preference, disciplinary history, or ability level” (p. 22).²

The bill is technically problematic, for multiple additional reasons:

- It appears that the bill would allow for any public-school student who reports an incident of bullying to be eligible for transfer, including cyberbullying and whether or not the incident was verified, such that any public school student could request a transfer.

- It appears that students would continue to be counted for enrollment in the “home” district even though they are attending elsewhere, confounding accountability and cost factors.
- No language is offered in the bill to require either another district or a private school to accept any such students, so the youth could be rejected by school after school.
- A scholarship to attend a different school does not guarantee the student will not be bullied at the receiving school, so in essence perpetually kicking the can down the road rather than working towards resolution within the current school systems.
- Students with particular attributes or behaviors that may have subjected them to bullying in their home school setting, may be outright rejected by private schools for those same attributes.
- This option may be not applicable to more rural areas of Kansas and therefore inequitable.

Inherent problems with the underlying program of proposed bill:

School choice vs parental choice. Tax credit scholarships/vouchers give choice to private non-public schools, not parents. Private/non-public schools by definition can be selective about who they choose to admit and to reject. This bill would allow for taxpayer dollars to be re-routed to schools which are not required to serve all Kansas children, many of whom this bill allegedly designed. Bullied students who do not meet the non-public schools’ specific ethnic, religious, academic, athletic or other expectations can exclude those youth whose educational needs are most resource intensive.

Lack of accountability. Any non-public school providing education to elementary and secondary students is eligible for taxpayer scholarship funds. Yet, non-public schools are exempt from standards and accountability requirements.³ Public tax credits funds can be awarded to un-accredited entities. Non-public private programs can opt out of state testing, nor are they required to publish test results and are legally allowed to withhold critical financial information. Scholarship receiving programs would not be required to adhere to legislative mandates like the proposed suicide prevention in-service for teachers or Celebrate Freedom Week curriculum, and other such directives. The Scholarship program has no comprehensive assessment of student achievement nor credible measure of its educational program impact to inform parents and tax payers. Furthermore, the state would be unable to assess the efficiency of these alternative choices in comparison to the public school districts, because comparable achievement and financial data is be unavailable. Further, the bill weakens parental accountability for making an informed choice by repealing public school attendance as a criteria for scholarship eligibility.

The financially impact of the bill has not been published, but likely highly disruptive.

As a parent and taxpayer, it seems that the prudent course of action would be to re-dedicate state efforts on the existing public education infrastructure, to strengthen our centers of learning that welcome all Kansas youth, and to invest the resources required by our great Kansas educators to provide every child with the opportunity to achieve rigorous state education standard.

The Kansas PTA respectfully asks that the 2019 Kansas legislature prioritize school finance this session. We urge a timely resolution of the Gannon school finance lawsuit. We ask that committee members support school finance bills that reflect the State Board of Education recommendations and are in keeping with the State's own argument to return to good standing under the *Montoy Safe Harbor*. The

Governor's budget proposal accounts for this level of funding, and the plaintiffs have signaled conditional approval. For the past ten years, parents and educators alike have been asking the legislature to fulfill their constitutional obligation to our children's educational needs and the future of our state. Please make the school finance inflation fix your education policy priority this session. Parents will once again be able to rely on the state's investment in public education and to bank on the school doors being open each fall. Our district leaders and teachers will be in a better position to engage in long-term planning and to better optimize their use of finite resources.

On behalf of the parents, teachers, and patrons of the Kansas PTA, we respectfully oppose the Kansas hope scholarship act – bullying voucher bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Cc: Lauri DeNooy, President-Elect
Brian Hogsett, VP of Advocacy
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Mary Sinclair, PhD, Advocacy Team

THE PTA POSITION

Kansas PTA is a [nonpartisan](#) association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities. [PTA mission and purpose](#) have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child's potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

¹ Kansas PTA Legislative Platform and Priorities (2018-2019). http://www.kansas-pta-legislative.org/sites/default/files/2018KsPTALegPriorities_0.pdf

² Network for Public Education (2017). School privatization explained. <https://networkforpubliceducation.org/fight-privatization/>

³ Kansas Regulations (2015). <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic/kansas.html>