



Olathe Public Education Network

Advocacy Group for Olathe Public Schools

HB 2119

Creating the student empowerment act to provide an education savings account for students who are academically at-risk.

February 4, 2021

Written Testimony to House K- 12 Education Budget Committee

Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams

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Oppose House Bill 2119 – Education Savings Accounts

Hearing: Thursday, February 4, 2021, 3:30 PM Room 546 – S

Honorable Chairman Williams and Committee Members:

We appreciate this chance to provide written testimony on HB 2119 education savings account bill. OPEN, Olathe Public Education Network, opposes this voucher program and others like it, consistent with our position of supporting public education and the prudent, accountable use of taxpayer dollars designated for all public school students, both typically developing students and students requiring the needs of special education programs.

We are especially concerned about new Amendment H, new section 2: “‘Qualified private school’ means any accredited private school (h) and any **nonaccredited private school** [emphasis added] registered with the state board of education”

The misdirection of our tax dollars over to unaccredited, even informal schools, represents an appalling misuse of taxpayer funds and a dismaying lack of accountability on the part of the state legislature. This committee is accountable for the careful, judicious use of taxpayer funds, and this bill violates that mandate.

House bill 2119 also drains public school budgets during a pandemic, when public school resources are already stretched as districts meet the educational and nutrition needs of our students, often through long volunteer hours by teachers and staff. In addition, now more than ever, public school districts, unlike private and unaccredited schools must and do serve ALL students, especially those children needing special education services. At this moment, Special Education must be funded by statute. This bill represents an unfunded mandate.

Public schools need more equipment and services for distance learning, both improved internet hardware and software. This is no time to be sliding public school monies over into inadequate private school vouchers and ignoring the legal requirements for special education.

Currently in Johnson County, students in remote, hybrid and in-building classrooms are experiencing significantly improved mental health outcomes, even with the economic and social stresses of the pandemic. Any argument that student mental health will benefit from this ill-conceived voucher program is unconvincing. We are encouraged to report that most of our children and grandchildren are facing this pandemic with resilience and optimism, and our taxpayer dollars must rightfully be directed to the public schools they attend and we support.

We are requesting that you work to fully fund schools—these schools benefit not only our kids, but also our community, and we will continue to support our schools and the farsighted, equitable use of our tax dollars, always to be invested in accredited, financially accountable public education programs.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony and thank you for your work on this committee.

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OPEN
Olathe Public Education Network

Nikki Johnston McDonald, Director
Nancy Ingram
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“Johnson County’s youth suicide rate fell 33% during the pandemic last year.”
Juliana Garcia *Shawnee Mission Post*. Feb 02, 2021