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BILL NUMBER: HB 2119

BILL DESCRIPTION: Creating the student empowerment act; providing education savings accounts for students who are academically at risk

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY:

I am writing to express my profound support of public schools and passionate opposition to ESAs, vouchers, or any other misleading term used for a system that diverts public tax dollars to private institutions. I will begin by sharing our very positive experience remote schooling our two elementary children in the Shawnee Mission School District. My sixth grader is in gifted with an IEP and accommodations to meet his needs for advanced math (honors Geometry as a 6th grader). His teachers have been as thoughtful and diligent as ever to see that he is still engaged and challenged while learning at home. His test scores have continued to grow and be in the 99th percentile. On the other end, I have a first grader who ultimately spent 3 quarters inside a school building before everyone went remote last spring. Despite being new to a formal learning environment, he is also doing well as a remote learner. His teacher is very engaging and attentive to her virtual classroom. She monitors the kids while keeping them interested and involved in their lessons. He is also growing according to test scores. None of our teachers rely on just virtual meetings. They have written, printed assignments that require hands on work from students. They read. They get up and move their bodies.

I know not all remote students experiences are the same. Such differences are the fault of state funding not the desires of a school district and it's staff. Kansas has spent years gutting it's education funding, and it will take years to get back to meeting basic standards. In a pandemic that has upended every part of lives across the globe, basics would not cover what is needed to accommodate students. Even countries with robust public education systems had to provide additional funding to meet safety needs. Yet they did it because they see the clear value in equitable public education. If Kansan's want equitable education, including the instance of remote learning, the answer is to appropriately fund public schools across the state. Increase the state budget for public schools, and they will be able to meet the needs of all students in all situations. Stop tying their hands and then blaming them for not using those hands. Give public educators what they need. They are great heroes and miracle workers as it is, so imagine what they can accomplish when they actually have the funding to fully support our students.

As a taxpayer, I am appalled that elected officials meant to serve the public would send my tax dollars to a private institution. I do not pay taxes to see them given to an institution that is allowed to make money by charging for it's service, fundraise, obtain loans, and any number of other methods open to private groups and companies. Not

only do they have no right to public dollars, there are no regulations in place to even ensure that any money they receive is used for education. They can use it for anything they want. And while doing whatever they feel like with those public tax dollars, they can deny acceptance to students for no reason whatsoever. And even if they accept students, ESAs/vouchers almost never cover the cost of attending such an institution. ESAs are a lie, and my tax dollars better not be sent to one. I am happy to pay tax dollars that support my community through public services like police, road maintenance, and public schools. I absolutely do not pay tax dollars to see them taken from such public goods and services to, instead, be misused and given to private institutions. If you claim to support responsible government use of tax dollars, then you should absolutely be opposed to ESAs. Public money is simply disguised by a fancy term (ESA or voucher) to fund private schools. It is a gross abuse of tax payers' trust, blatant misuse of tax dollars, and has no place in our system.

I do not support Kansas Bill HB2119, and I urge, I expect, all of you to throw it out of the committee immediately.