

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

February 8th, 2021

House Bill 2119

Opponent Written Testimony By
Brian Leighty, Board Member
Dighton USD 482

Chair Williams and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony on **House Bill 2119**. My name is Brian Leighty. I am the father of three daughters who attend Dighton USD 482; a farmer in Lane County, Kansas; and, privileged by the local electorate to serve them on the Dighton school board. I also serve as their representative and as a board member of Schools for Quality Education.

I am deeply troubled by what appears to be the attitude of the legislature toward the efforts our public schools are making in Kansas to serve our students. **House Bill 2119** seems to evidence many of my concerns. My daughters are no different than any other student in Kansas. All students deserve a quality education and I am proud to say that I support the extraordinary efforts of our schools to provide them a quality education, particularly during these trying times. Allow me to express a few of my concerns.

First, I strongly feel as many of my neighbors do that it is totally inappropriate to shuffle our public tax dollars to any private entity that is not responsible to its local electorate. As a parent, I get to choose how my children are educated. If I chose a non-public entity, then I recognize that it is at my expense.

Second, this bill appears to place another unfunded bureaucratic mandate on school districts by requiring them to identify under several moving variables those students who may qualify and then do the paperwork and notify their parents. A similar bureaucracy is created in the State Treasurer's office, except that 5% of the dollars are siphoned off as an administrative fee. I feel that these dollars need to stay where they are now, serving our students.

Third, this bill raises all sorts of issues about accountability. As an elected board member, I am held to account to my neighbors every election cycle. Our elected state board guides, audits and oversees our work to make sure that we focus our tax dollars on our students needs. You, the legislature, provide oversight as evidenced by several post audit studies. Even the federal government looks over our shoulder. We welcome

this accountability because we spend tax dollars and rightly should be held to account for how we spend public funds. I see nothing in this bill that would put private schools under this same degree of accountability. I doubt that you, our legislators, would seriously consider a bill lowering our degree of accountability to that of the private schools. Perhaps of greater concern is that this bill lacks the accountability to assure and document that any student who uses this program will benefit. There appears to be no individual tracking to evaluate whether the student improved or declined in achievement after leaving their public school.

My last concern is discrimination. Our Dighton schools willingly open their doors to all students, regardless of race, religion, gender and sexual orientation. We do not discriminate, even though we are subject to many laws that prevent it. Private schools, unless they volunteer, are not. A recent news article indicated that tuition at a private parochial school varied in Kansas, depending upon whether a student is Catholic.

Again, I do appreciate your taking the time to listen to my concerns. My hope is that you will not pass this bill out of committee.

Respectfully,

Brian Leighty
Dighton, Kansas
USD 482 – Board Member
SQE – Board Member