

Dear Senators,

I first want to express my gratitude to you for the service you provide our state. Your time and dedication does not go unnoticed by our family. We appreciate the thought and care you put into each decision you make for Kansas families.

I am writing regarding SB437 and the Kansas Education Enrichment Program. This past year, my three children have benefitted from KEEP funds immensely. My husband and I find incredible value in keeping our children involved in local activities. Thanks to the KEEP funding our children received, we were able to enroll each child in an Imaginarium class in the Fall. Our oldest son learned 3-D printing and was able to manufacture several products using TinkerCad. The younger two children attended an animal science class and studied a variety of different creatures.

Without KEEP funds, we would not have been able to afford for the children to attend these classes. The experiences they had at Imaginarium are unmatched in our school's curriculum and they would not have been able to uncover hidden interests and talents without that exposure. Imaginarium also offers week long daycamps in the Summer. We plan to use leftover funds to send each child to a week of daycamp to broaden their experiences.

Another way we were able to utilize the funds for our children was to replace an old, out of tune, hand-me-down piano with a brand new electric piano complete with weighted keys and pedals. All of our children take piano lessons from a local woman. Our old piano was passed down from friends, did not hold tune, and had broken keys. While it worked for basic piano skills, our oldest son began to feel frustrated when the keys he needed to play for his lessons were not working properly. Because of KEEP, we were able to purchase a significantly better instrument for all of our children to use for many years to come.

While these examples show the benefit of KEEP funds to families like mine, they do not directly illustrate the impact the funds have on local communities. I mentioned earlier that our family finds great value and being involved in our local activities. We also prioritize shopping local, as often as we can, to stretch the impact of our dollar in our community. Imaginarium is a local business run by local residents. We purchased the piano from our local music store. Because we were able to spend extra money we would not normally have in our local businesses, that money stays local to pay the wages of the employees here in our town.

Senators, we appreciated having access to KEEP funds this past year. Our children benefitted greatly from the opportunities they were afforded. They are looking forward to continued opportunities and we are grateful to have received the ability to provide new experiences for our children that they would have otherwise missed.

With Gratitude,

Miles and Marcy Shirk
Emporia, KS