

Written Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee
Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams
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Oppose House Bill 2395 A bill that includes a voucher program, a proposed “Kansas Hope Scholarship Act” that would allow parents of kids bullied in public schools to take state tax dollars and use them as a scholarship for other schools, including private ones.

Hearing: March 18

By Nikki McDonald, Chair, Olathe Public Education Network
March 13, 2019

Honorable Chairperson Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 2395. On behalf of the non-partisan grassroots community educational advocacy group, Olathe Public Education Network (OPEN), I am writing to request that you not pass Bill 2395 out of committee. As a public school education advocacy group, we are opposed to voucher/scholarship programs that take public money from public schools and funnel it to private schools. Our strong tradition of high quality public schools is one we intend to continue & we will remain diligently opposed to public education dollars being diverted to the private sector.

In an AP article on 3-12-19 by John Hannah, Rep. Ryckman was quoted as saying, “We’re all wanting what’s best for kids,”. However, this scholarship proposal would not fall in the category of being what is best for ALL Kansas kids... In our eyes, this would benefit private schools at the expense of public schools by robbing them of funding. Undermining public school funding in the name of “school choice” is clearly doing a disservice to our Kansas Public Schools by cutting them off at the knees. Public schools are required to accept ALL children. Private schools are not. Public schools are held to a higher standard and have accountability built into the system. Private schools have no such requirement. If we really want to do what is best for all Kansas school children, we would invest in our local public schools & comply with the court order to adjust for inflation to fully fund education in Kansas.

We also take issue with the assumption that bullying only happens in the public school setting. Private schools are not immune to bullying issues. By removing the child who is bullied, we send a message to the bully that their behavior will not have personal consequences. Who is to say that an LGBTQ child would be less bullied in a private religious school setting than in a public school? Bullying should absolutely be taken seriously, but our hope is that districts would exercise their local control by deciding to spend money on counselors, social workers and training to help teachers learn how to better address these concerns in the classroom. It is not the job of the legislature to micromanage to this degree.

The Olathe Public School District is the fastest growing school district in the area, listed among "America's Top 25 Places to Live and Go to School." With an enrollment of over 29,000 students, our district employs over 2,500 teachers. Our school district is one of the driving reasons that major corporations have located in our community. Our schools have created a competitive and desirable economic climate, attractive to families and businesses both small and large. Olathe families value our public schools and regard them as a sound, growing investment in the future of our community. Olathe Public Schools have a graduation rate of over 90%, and the District offers more than 60 Advanced Placement, College, and College Equivalent courses. This is the kind of preparation that creates an educated workforce, individuals who create jobs in their communities and drive a vigorous local economy, thanks to our public school system. Our district has strong community support, but the legislation before you will require our patrons to add more than \$1,250,000 to our budget, dollars we neither voted on, nor approved. This extra burden on our local district's carefully constructed plans is unnecessary; this bill bypasses our own local control of our schools. We understand that the Committee is working to ensure the best possible environment for our schools, but this bill will make no monetary contribution to that effort. For that reason we request that you not pass HB 2395 out of committee, out of respect for the values and economics of our local school district.

At this time we would also like to take the opportunity to extend an invitation to you to visit our Olathe public schools, meet our staff and parents, and see for yourselves our vital and energetic classrooms. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.