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**February 4, 2021**

**Written Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee**

**Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams**

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Room 286-N, State Capitol Building

**Oppose [House Bill 2119](#) – Education Savings Accounts**

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

Honorable Chairman Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide remote testimony on [HB 2119](#) education savings account bill. The Kansas PTA is opposed to this and similar voucher-type programs, in alignment with [Priority 11 of our legislative platform](#).

First, the Kansas PTA supports keeping public dollars in schools that are required to adhere to the comprehensive package of state accreditation and reporting requirements, including the publication of student outcome and demographic data. While the similar tax credit scholarship program allows participating schools to opt-out of the state accreditation system for “*a national or regional accrediting agency that is recognized by the state board for the purpose of satisfying the teaching performance assessment for professional licensure*” only, HB 2119 has no accreditation requirement at all for participating private schools or non-public programs. Nor would it require participating schools to post performance accountability information, as noted in Section 14 of the bill.

To date, no report has been published on the KSDE website or elsewhere regarding the performance of the 2,143 Kansas students who have participated in the similar Kansas [tax credit scholarship program](#). Student outcome data is necessary to determine whether this type of program is working, relative to similar peers in the public schools or relative to their performance prior to admissions. Nor is relevant information reported on which eligible private schools are participating in the program and the number of scholarship students they are each serving.

Kansas Department of Education [KESA Reporting Requirements](#) go well beyond simple registration of name and address, the base requirement noted in Section 3 for a qualified private school or home school, along with core curriculum courses. As a parent and taxpayer, we know that our neighborhood public schools actively participate in these accountability

processes and compliance measures including: system yearly update reports, outside visitation team annual report, improvement goals, annual local board of education reporting, staffed by licensed teachers, five-year professional development plans, educator mentoring and induction plans, child nutrition and wellness compliance, early childhood ages and states questionnaire, state assessments, annual social-emotional learning training, suicide awareness Jason Flatt Act training, anti-bullying policies and plans, individual plans for study for every student, ACT and WorkKeys participation, data quality reporter training, KIDS reporting, title services reporting, IDEA reporting, and dyslexia reporting.

Second, many parents of students in the public schools would greatly appreciate the opportunity to receive state funds for many of the allowed uses of the individual savings accounts as noted in Section 10 of the bill: (1) student fees; (3) fees for bus transportation among families who live under 2.5 miles from school; (4) educational therapies or services; (5) tutoring services provided by a certified tutor; (8) fees for any nationally standardized norm-referenced achievement test, advanced placement examination or other examination related to admission to a postsecondary educational institution; and (10) tuition and fees charged by a postsecondary educational institution.

Third, the proposed definition of eligible students under Section 3 appears to reach beyond the targeted at-risk youth, functionally declaring well over half of the student population eligible particularly in large districts. Furthermore, the student eligibility criteria associated with remote or hybrid learning in the public schools is conversely one of the approved uses for the education savings account but only for an accredited private online learning program as noted in Section 10. If the lack of on-site learning is assumed to place students at-risk, why would a private online program be any different, assuming the global pandemic is a temporary condition? If parents and students want to choose a virtual school, multiple Kansas public school districts offer these programs.

Fourth, voucher-type programs end up being more about school choice, than parent choice. Kansas PTA supports the use of public dollars by schools that are required to serve all students, regardless of the educational needs or other differentiating characteristics. Under Section 13, “enrollment of an eligible student in a qualified private school shall be considered a parental placement of such student under the individuals with disabilities education act” meaning private schools are not required to make special accommodations for students with disabilities beyond the private school’s typical instructional services offered to all students, waiving parental rights to an IEP as a function of admissions. Private schools can waitlist students if their class sizes exceed safe distancing options needed to adhere to CDC COVID19 safety protocols. Public schools cannot make students wait and tend to operate with larger class sizes, restricting secondary schools in most large districts to hybrid in-person learning due in part to: the need to follow CDC safety protocols in the face of high community prevalence rates of COVID19, state funding parameters that limit staffing guidelines, and as reflected in the Kansas public schools 96% efficiency rating leaving very little room for districts to pivot ([Taylor et al, WestED, 2018](#)).

Of those private schools who do admit a more diverse population, they are not required to retain those youth whose academic performance or behavior falls below a certain threshold. Across decades of research on school dropouts, one of the top reasons kids give for not

completing high school is that they were PUSHED out by their school ([Boylan & Rensulli, 2017](#)). A Director with the Catholic Diocese openly stated that their private schools essentially blame the student for failing and actively counsel them out.

“There is always going to be a time, as they [students] mature up to high school. And if they don’t start passing some classes, they are not going to graduate from our schools. Because we have a higher academic standard. So we have to transition kids to a different school, just because they are not going to meet the educational requirements. But that is their own choice, because of how they worked in the schools”  
(<https://youtu.be/cGFuVI5qLjU?t=3355>, Director of Development Catholic Diocese of Wichita, KS House K12 Budget Committee, Jan 2021, 56:00 min mark).

No one stakeholder group has the corner on frustration. The global pandemic has been challenging for students, parents, teachers, administrators, coaches, business owners, public health professionals, elected officials and more. The Kansas PTA respectfully urges committee members to oppose this bill and instead stay on course with the Gannon school finance agreement and support for COVID19 safety protocols, including access to vaccinations and more capacity for rapid and in-home testing kits. The Kansas legislature is still two and a half years away from restoring K-12 public schools to constitutionally adequate levels of funding. And nearly a full year of the first three and half years of phased-in funding restoration has been during a global pandemic that significantly disrupted the learning process. Getting our kids back to full, in-person learning is a shared priority, but the high rates of community transmission in Kansas have caused staffing challenges and pose ongoing health risks to our children, our teachers and all the building staff. Adherence to protective measures in schools, like masks, social distancing, hand washing and deep cleaning, have kept the spread in schools low. Schools need continued support to ensure safety steps can continue while the vaccine is being rolled out.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We urge you to vote NO on HB 2119.

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### ***THE PTA POSITION***

*Kansas PTA is a nonpartisan association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities. [PTA mission and purpose](#) have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child’s potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.*