

February 23, 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 [Senate Bill 61](#) – Amending the tax credit for low income students scholarship program act to expand student eligibility.

Hearing: Tuesday, February 23, 2021, 3:30 PM Room 546-S

Honorable Chairman Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding SB 61 – tax credit scholarship expansion. **The Kansas PTA is opposed to this bill.**

Kansas PTA has the same concerns noted in previous testimony on HB 2068 and beginning back in 2014 when the [tax credit scholarship program](#) was first established. The legislative platform and priorities of Kansas PTA affirms that our membership opposes the use of voucher-type programs for the tuition of non-public schools, including the tax credit scholarship program. Our opposition stems from a number of concerns, including that non-public schools are not required to accept all students and can discriminate in admissions, can operate under different rules of transparency and accountability, can ask parents to waive their children’s access to special education services and can require religious instruction to the exclusion of all but one ([KS PTA Legislative Priority 11](#)).

Beyond these ethical and constitutional problems of inequity, empirical evidence warns against the implementation of such programs.

Studies across three states have demonstrated that students who used vouchers experienced worse academic outcomes than their peers, including Louisiana ([April 2019](#)). Multiple longitudinal studies of voucher programs found that students who received vouchers showed no improvement in reading or math over those not in the program including the District of Columbia ([May 2019](#)). School vouchers are not a proven strategy for improving student achievement. Studies of U.S. and international voucher programs show that the risks to school systems outweigh insignificant gains in test scores and limited gains in graduation rates ([Economic Policy Institute, Carnoy 2017](#)).

The objectives of SB 61 also appear to run contrary to the original rationale used by those who advocated to establish the program in the first place. First, current law targets struggling schools, as a proxy for struggling students. Yet, this bill would allow students to access public dollars for private school tuition regardless of the performance of the public school they attend, including high achieving and improving schools. In essence, at-risk students would be less likely to be identified for scholarship dollars under this proposed change. Furthermore, these same students could be transferring to lower performing schools, less capable of meeting their needs. Second, no data has been reported on state assessment scores and such of the 2,143 participating scholarship students to date, to warrant expansion of this program. It is possible that these students could be doing worse. Finally, this bill takes millions of public dollars out of the state general fund pool to fund services for students whose special needs are not provided for by the state school finance formula. The school finance at-risk weighting formula only allows districts to generate funds for students eligible for free lunch, not reduced lunch.

The tax credit scholarship program in reality gives choice to private non-public schools, not to parents. Private, non-public schools by definition can be selective about who they choose to admit and who they choose to reject. As parents and taxpayers, it seems that the prudent course of action would be to commit to the Gannon school finance resolution, continue to restore state efforts on the existing public education infrastructure, to strengthen our centers of learning that welcome all Kansas youth, and to invest the resources required by our great Kansas educators to provide every child with the opportunity to achieve rigorous state education standards ([Gannon v State, 2019](#)). Kansas legislators have a constitutional obligation to provide adequate and equitable opportunity for all students to achieve, not just a select few.

On behalf of the parents, teachers, and patrons of the Kansas PTA, we oppose HB 2068 and we thank you for your time and consideration.

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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.