



Testimony before the  
House K-12 Education Budget Committee  
in **OPPOSITION** to  
**House Bill 2150 — Enacting the Kansas hope scholarship act**  
by  
**Game On for Kansas Schools**  
Judith Deedy, Executive Director  
February 14, 2019

Ms. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill 2150.

Game On for Kansas Schools is a nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy effort among Kansans who share a belief in high-quality public education as a right of all Kansas students. We advocate for Kansas public schools to ensure our teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members have the resources necessary to deliver quality education to all Kansas students. We inform communities across the state about education funding and policy issues and legislation affecting our students. The Game On team includes members representing the spectrum of education stakeholders (parents, educators, and other community advocates), and our membership extends statewide.

Our primary opposition to this bill is that it is a voucher bill. It uses a scholarship mechanism to avoid technically being a voucher and to avoid alerting the public to the fact that this is a voucher bill in disguise. Like the tax credit scholarship bills in past sessions, one of this bill's purposes is to erode support for public schools and make vouchers more appealing. We firmly believe public funds should remain with public schools. This bill allows public funds to go to schools that may select or refuse any student, and which lack publicly-elected oversight. Furthermore, recent research gives reason for concern regarding student outcomes in voucher schools.<sup>1</sup>

This bill is not only misleading in its purpose, it is an inappropriate use of public funds. Although the proposed scholarship mechanism avoids the direct funding of religious institutions, the fact remains that most private schools in Kansas are religious. Religious schools are free to exist in Kansas, but they should not receive taxpayer funding. We oppose this bill because, contrary to the spirit of our state constitution, it flows public dollars to religious schools and supports segregation of students based on religious beliefs.

We also find this bill to be too broad. First, this bill allows a "scholarship" for any student who reports a bullying incident. There is no requirement that reported bullying be confirmed or found to have merit before a scholarship is granted. There is also

- no requirement that the public school first fail to resolve the bullying incident.
- no requirement that the student receiving the "scholarship" actually be the alleged and direct victim of the bullying.
- no requirement that the private school demonstrate how a bullied child would not also be subject to bullying in their school.

While we are not experts in bullying or statewide school transfer policies, we know that in many cases, public school students may transfer to other schools within their districts and many

already do so without having a program like the one in this bill. While students in rural districts may not have as many options, they also often don't have many private school options either.

Finally, we oppose efforts to increase private school “scholarships” at a time when we are being told there may not be sufficient funding for our public schools and the vast majority of Kansas school children who are served by them. As we begin this legislative session, we hear some legislators objecting to funding the inflation adjustment highlighted by the Kansas Supreme Court in the Gannon case. We also hear legislators voicing concern about the sustainability of the school finance plan. When there are concerns about funding and sustainability, it seems contradictory to propose to funnel money away from public schools to private schools.

As parents and educators, we do not believe giving scholarships for private schools is an appropriate, effective or affordable remedy for a bullying incident. For these reasons, we urge this committee to vote against this bill.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, **The Highly Negative Impacts of Vouchers**, Ulrich Boser, Meg Benner, and Erin Roth, March 20, 2018 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/03/20/446699/highly-negative-impacts-vouchers/>

“How bad are school vouchers for students? Far worse than most people imagine. Indeed, according to the analysis conducted by the authors of this report, the use of school vouchers—which provide families with public dollars to spend on private schools—is equivalent to missing out on more than one-third of a year of classroom learning. In other words, this analysis found that the overall effect of the D.C. voucher program on students is the same as missing 68 days of school.

“This analysis builds on a large body of voucher program evaluations in Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., all of which show that students attending participating private schools perform significantly worse than their peers in public schools—especially in math.<sup>1</sup> A recent, rigorous evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program from the U.S. Department of Education reaffirms these findings, reporting that D.C. students attending voucher schools performed significantly worse than they would have in their original public school.”