

February 9, 2023

Testimony to the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee

NAME: Colleen Cunningham

TITLE: Parent with Blue Valley school district, former special ed teacher for Shawnee Mission school district, former homeschool student

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BILL NUMBER: SB 128, Opportunity Tax Credit

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

Dear Chair & members of the committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 128.

I oppose this bill for a number of reasons:

- As a parent of elementary and middle school children, and as a homeowner, I believe we should be doing all we can to strengthen our state's neighborhood public schools. Going back to the 1830s, American leaders like Horace Mann recognized that investing in public education would benefit entire communities by creating literate, moral and productive citizens.
- As a taxpayer, I don't believe it is appropriate for taxpayer dollars to be handed off to private schools, particularly those with religious mandates. Doing so blurs the line that separates church and state.
- In my PhD program in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies, we learned that our public schools are often the hub of communities, particularly in rural areas, and I have seen this in my own experiences. When schools are forced to consolidate and close, it has an adverse impact on those communities. This bill would exacerbate that effect by leaving rural communities without options beyond underfunded public schools.
- As a former special education teacher, I often had to choose between spending my own salary on purchasing items my students needed for their learning or watching them go without. Instead of taking taxpayer dollars and sending them to private schools, I believe your committee should be laser-focused on providing full funding for special education, particularly while we have a budget surplus.
- Also as a former special education teacher, I am very aware that many of these private schools can deny access to students with disabilities, unlike our public neighborhood schools. These private schools, and home schools, also lack public oversight. When I taught special education students, I was tasked with creating assessments which demonstrated that they were learning the same things as their same-grade peers; that is to say there was accountability to the public, because we were receiving taxpayer dollars. That simply isn't the case when we hand taxpayer dollars to private schools or home schools.

I would ask that, rather than working to remove taxpayer funding from our public schools in

favor of private schools that lack oversight, which aren't required to serve all students, which simply aren't available as a "choice" to all students, all of which will have dire economic consequences particularly for rural communities, your committee members instead work diligently and with laser-focus on fully funding Special Education services for our Kansas kids.

For these reasons, I oppose SB128.

Thank you for your consideration.

Colleen Cunningham
Overland Park