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Testimony to House Committee on Education

Honorable Chair, Representative Ron Highland, DVM, PhD
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Sue.Mollenkamp@house.ks.gov Room 112-N
Hearing, 1:30 pm Location: 112-N, Tues, Feb 2, 2016

Testimony Kansas PTA Opposed to HB2457 – Tax Credit Scholarship Expansion

Chairman Highland and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB2457 – tax credit scholarship expansion. The Kansas PTA is here today in **opposition to this proposed bill**.

Kansas PTA still shares the same concerns expressed in 2014, when we first testified in opposition to this program. The legislative platform and priorities of the PTA clearly states that our membership “opposes the use of vouchers, scholarships or tax credits toward the tuition of non-public schools that can discriminate in admissions, provide sectarian religious instruction or ‘compete’ under different rules than public schools” ([KS PTA Legislative Priority 5](#)). Ethically, constitutionally, empirically – vouchers and voucher type programs are fatally flawed.

No voucher study anywhere has ever shown academic gains; not in Milwaukee, not in D.C., not in Cleveland. ([Diane Ravitch, 2016](#) - education historian).

Children in poverty are dismissed. Before addressing PTA’s opposition to voucher-type programs in general, HB2457 eliminates requirements that targeted outreach to those youth upon whom the champions of the original program based its need. Children living in poverty, Title 1 schools, have been removed from the program, as evidenced by: the income target raised to the 250% poverty threshold or about average Kansas median income ([p.1](#)); the new definition of “public school” on page 2 which removes the Title 1 designation ([p.2](#)). Consequently, the justification for this tax credit program or any proposed expansion appears to be invalidated by these elements of the proposed bill.

Inherent problems with the proposed expansion and underlying program:

First, school choice vs parental choice. Tax credit scholarships/vouchers give choice to private non-public schools, not parents. Private/non-public schools by definition can be selective about who they choose to admit and to reject. This bill would allow for \$12.5 million of taxpayer funds to be re-routed to schools which are not required to serve all Kansas children. In addition, the scholarship granting organizations, and now individuals, are given the authority to apply their own personal preferences in the selection of which students receive scholarships (omitting only dependents). This means public tax credit funds

can be withheld from students who do not meet the granters' or non-public schools' specific ethnic, religious, academic, athletic or other expectations, and exclude those youth whose educational needs are most resource intensive.

Second, lack of accountability. Any non-public school providing education to elementary and secondary students is eligible for taxpayer scholarship funds. Yet, non-public schools are exempt from standards and accountability requirements ([KS Regulations 2015](#)). Public tax credits funds can be awarded to un-accredited entities. Non-public private programs can opt out of state testing, nor are they required to publish test results and are legally allowed to withhold critical financial information. Scholarship receiving programs would not be required to adhere to legislative mandates like the proposed suicide prevention in-service for teachers or Celebrate Freedom Week curriculum, and other such directives. The Scholarship program has no comprehensive assessment of student achievement nor credible measure of its educational program impact to inform parents and tax payers. Furthermore, the state would be unable to assess the efficiency of these alternative choices in comparison to the public school districts, because comparable achievement and financial data is be unavailable. Further, the bill weakens parental accountability for making an informed choice by repealing public school attendance as a criteria for scholarship eligibility.

Third, the bill is financially questionable. The tax credit Scholarship Program cap is being increased to \$12.5 million and the proposed deductible contribution is maxed out at 100% for any and all Kansans - not just corporations. While a fiscal note was not available at the time the testimony was due, HB2457 clearly adds financial pressure to the State General Fund at a time when core services are being further reduced or eliminated and the pending Gannon lawsuit could increase the state's fiduciary obligation.

As a parent and taxpayer, it seems that the prudent course of action would be to re-dedicate 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 standard ([Legislative Post Audit, 2006](#)). Kansas legislators have a constitutional obligation to provide equitable opportunity for all students to achieve, not just a select hundred or two.

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



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Cc: Josh Halperin, VP of Advocacy
Devin Wilson, State Legislative Co-Chair

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. Our mission and values have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago: to facilitate every child's potential by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

National PTA Position regarding School Choice:

- *National PTA opposes any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system that diverts public funds to private or sectarian schools.*
- *National PTA believes home schools and other nonpublic schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools.*