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Written Testimony to House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Stand Up Blue Valley: Families for Our Schools Opposes HB 2048

Providing additional student eligibility under the tax credit for low income students scholarship program and increasing the amount of the tax credit for contributions made pursuant to such program.

Hearing: Wednesday, January 25, 2023, 3:30 PM Room 546-S

Stand Up Blue Valley: Families for Our Schools is a parent and patron advocacy group in the Blue Valley School District. We advocate for legislation that supports Blue Valley Schools and work to help our community understand the importance of their votes to our schools.

Madam Chair and Committee members:

Stand Up Blue Valley: Families for Our Schools has had the opportunity to review HB 2048 and we would like to submit testimony in **opposition** to this bill.

As we have testified before, **we oppose any diversion of tax money to private schools.** We oppose any expansion of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, and we oppose the addition of any other program to divert tax money away from public schools to private schools.

When the Tax Credit Scholarship Program was initially created in 2014, over the objections of public school supporters, student eligibility was limited to those in grades K - 8 and eligible for free and reduced lunch. HB 2048 would expand eligible students to those in grades K - **12** and would additionally increase the number eligible by moving the income eligibility line from 185% (currently the line is at free or reduced lunch eligibility) to **250%** of the federal poverty guidelines. This would significantly increase the number of students eligible. HB 2048 would add eligibility for students whose parents meet certain arbitrary employment or vocation specifications and students who are *or ever* were in foster care. These designations serve only to increase eligibility for this unproven program. Like the students originally designated for program inclusion, there is no evidence to support the notion that private school education would benefit the added categories of students.

Including provisions to increase the aggregate credit limit from 10 to 20 million dollars is also unacceptable. We oppose designating any additional tax money to fund private schools.

It appears, from the repeated attempts to expand the original program, that in the years of the program's existence, it has not met expectations in terms of maximizing the number of tax credit dollars that can be claimed. HB 2048 would significantly widen the net of students eligible for this voucher-like tax diversion scheme, again with no evidence to suggest that those students will benefit educationally. It appears that the sole impetus behind the changes that HB 2048 is to increase tax dollars that are withheld from the state general fund via this tax credit scheme.

Stand Up Blue Valley is in extreme opposition to the provision in HB 2048 that would increase the tax credit for donors to this voucher scheme from 70% tax credit to 100%. HB 2048 would essentially allow a donor to pay into a private school tuition fund and credit **every penny** of that payment toward their Kansas taxes. This type of tax credit is not available to any taxpayer for any other donation, no matter how philanthropic. Assigning this very special designation to the funding of private schools is not in the best interest of any Kansas student, any Kansas school district, or any Kansas citizen - other than the few who will use this tax loophole to their financial benefit as they fund private schools of their own choosing.

Blue Valley taxpayers understand that our taxes go to support our excellent public schools, which provide a quality education to over 22,000 students, support over 3000 jobs in our area, and turn out graduates who return to enhance our community. Our Blue Valley Schools are the backbone of our local economy and result in high home values as businesses and people move here for the schools. We disagree with the premise that some taxpayers would be allowed to get a credit on their taxes (thereby lowering the amount of taxes they are paying) in order to use their money to fund private schools. We disagree with the premise that private schools should be given tax money.

If philanthropically-minded individuals wish to fund scholarships for low income students to attend private schools, by all means they should do that. They should NOT, however, be allowed to deduct 100% of that sum from the tax they owe to the state of Kansas. If private schools wish to provide scholarships for students they choose to admit, by all means they should do that, using the many mechanisms available to them and already in use - but they should not be allowed to use tax money to do so.

Private schools often include religious curriculum. While we fully support the right of parents to send their students to any religious school they choose, we don't believe our tax dollars should be paying for religious education.

Private schools are not required to accept any student. We are aware of Blue Valley families whose special needs students were not able to attend BV-area private schools due to their needs not being met there. Expansion of eligibility for students to use Tax Credit Scholarships to attend private school expands the ability of private schools to benefit from accepting/choosing students who are easier to educate and leaving a disproportionate number of students with learning disabilities, physical differences, and behavioral issues for public schools to educate. With excess Special Education costs already underfunded, expansion of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program stands to only worsen the deficit SpEd funding faces.

We fully support the right of parents to determine whether public school, private school, or home schooling is best for each child in their family. We do not believe the taxpayers of Kansas should pay for that choice.

We encourage committee members to work to ensure that Kansas Public Schools are fully funded to serve all Kansas students, including those with Special Education needs. Excess SpEd funds, required by law, are not currently being provided, which causes the Blue Valley School District to spend millions of dollars annually out of the general budget to cover SpEd costs. These general education dollars could and should be used for teacher salaries.

Stand Up Blue Valley remains opposed to the original Tax Credit Scholarship Program and we oppose any and all attempts to expand the diversion of state tax revenue to private schools. **We urge you to vote no on HB 2048.**