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Rep. Kristey Williams

Chairperson, K-12 Education Budget Committee
Kansas House of Representatives
Topeka, KS 66612

Chair Williams and members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to HB 2550, which proposes redirecting public funding to private schools for students that either qualify for subsidized lunch programs or who are eligible for at-risk services. As a parent of a student with an individualized education program that transferred *from* private school *to* our public school district, I have direct experience with the challenges of finding appropriate and high-quality teaching and support resources for children with special needs.

Speaking plainly, HB 2550 does not help my child or others in similar circumstances. Its only impact would be to enable children *without* special needs to transfer public school funds into parochial and other private schools, at the *detriment* of the public schools that are required to provide equitable learning to all children. Private schools are not required to teach any and all children, and actively use that status to create curricula and programs that are optimal for specific groups and demographics.

My son began his education at a private school. We were attracted to the perceived advantages that private education might afford. Unfortunately, after we received our son's autism spectrum diagnosis, our admission was rescinded. We have been through multiple supplemental education and therapy options ever since, including behavioral therapy and several years at a different private school that did their best to support us, but it was not enough.

Private schools are not required to serve all students, and as a result they do not internally staff the counselors and therapists and coaches and other educators trained with best practices for the range of developmental challenges that can face our children. Yes, we benefited from a lower teacher-to-student classroom ratio (a common selling point in private education), but none of that matters if the teachers in the room don't have the right resources.

Like most parents of children that require IEPs, we eventually reached the limit of what our private school was equipped to provide. Their intentions were good, but the structure of private

education simply does not create an opportunity for all students. Redirecting public funds towards these schools will not change this – they are still unbound by federal requirements to educate all children, and can select and shape their student body based on private goals.

Even worse, sending these critical funds away from public districts will deprive IEP and other children of the funding that makes their education possible. This bill does harm to the kids it suggests it's trying to help, and only provides financial benefit to families that have already integrated themselves into the private school pipeline.

Students in public schools already have many means for receiving publicly funded educational support from private institutions. When districts develop IEPs for students with special needs, sometimes those plans include funds for partnering with local private entities such as behavioral therapists or other specialized services that go beyond what the public district can internally provide. Diverting public funds also reduces school district flexibility and funding for these productive and long-standing partnerships.

If you sincerely want to provide assistance and choice to children in need, you will need to also require private schools that receive these public funds to eliminate their selective application protocols; require them to provide the same guarantees of equitable education that is afforded by Federal education guidelines; and guarantee continued resource levels for the existing public education programs that are already working very hard to support all children and provide student and parent choice.

Sincerely,

Jason Anderson
Treasurer, Freedom to Learn
Parent, Blue Valley School District