



House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
Chair, Rep. Kristey Williams
Hearing: February 1, 2022

Position – OPPOSE HB 2550, Student Empowerment Act

Chair Williams, and Members of the Committee,

The Mainstream Coalition opposes HB 2550.

The right to a suitable education is guaranteed by the Kansas Constitution for all children regardless of income, ability, race, or any other factor. This guarantee of public education is essential to meeting the academic and career readiness needs of our students, free of discrimination and religious or ideological influences.

HB 2550 is a transparent attempt to fund private educational institutions with public tax money. Though it is portrayed as a bill for students in need, there are no guarantees that these students will actually benefit. This bill instead allows for a broad cross section of private and religious schools to benefit, without the same accreditation standards that hold public schools to a strict scrutiny of student achievement and outcomes. In fact, although the so-called “scholarship program” began in 2014, there is no data available, or required, to assess its success in providing better outcomes for the students affected. In short, there is no guarantee that students moved to these schools are, in fact, doing better than they were in their public school setting.

Further, this bill allows private schools to continue admission policies that may harm our most vulnerable students. We as taxpayers should not be subsidizing private schools to discriminate or deny enrollment to children based on their religion, sexual orientation, academic standing, behavioral issues, or special education needs.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the US Constitution is the cornerstone of American religious freedom, ensuring that government does not support religious practices, favor one religion over another, or unnecessarily interfere with the private practice of religion. Mainstream was founded, in part, by faith leaders who believed strongly in the freedom to worship and a government that is free of religious ideology. The siphoning of public tax dollars into private schools, often those that promote a single religion as HB 2550 proposes, dangerously blurs this line and opens the door for increased governmental oversight and involvement in religion.

Founded in 1993, the Mainstream Coalition is a nonpartisan nonprofit that advocates for common sense public policy in Kansas. Our members do more than vote.

If, as some legislators have suggested, the public schools are “failing” some students, then it is within the power of the state to fix that. Instead of subsidizing private and often religious schools with public taxpayer dollars, the legislature should work with the Kansas Department of Education and State Board of Education to guarantee that constitutionally suitable public education is available to all Kansas children.

We urge you to oppose passage of HB 2550.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Poppa', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Poppa
Executive Director of the Mainstream Coalition