

**January 30, 2022**

**Oral Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee**

NAME: Dr. Sara Jahnke

TITLE: Shawnee Mission School District Parent

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CITY: Prairie Village

BILL NUMBER: HB 2550

BILL DESCRIPTION: Creating education savings accounts

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL TESTIMONY OR WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY: Oral

Dear Chairman & members of the committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill HB 2550.

I am a parent to a high school student at Shawnee Mission East, a kindergartner at Tomahawk Elementary, and a future SMSD student (2 years old). When I was pregnant with my second child (Crosby), we learned that he had Down Syndrome. We were quickly introduced to a whole world we never knew existed and often operates in the shadows of our communities – the world of Special Needs families.

We started receiving therapies and support from the state within weeks of his birth and through the school district when we transitioned from his private therapies to the district's early education program. We have been impressed with the efforts of the district and how dedicated the teachers, therapists, paras and administrators have been to seeing Crosby succeed. They have gone above and beyond – often on their own dime and time to do everything they can to see Crosby achieve his goals. They have been by our side through a number of triumphs and trials, tears and cheers. While Crosby is still nonverbal, we are able to regularly interact with his speech therapist who is working hand in hand with his occupational and physical therapists to make advances every day. He is currently being evaluated for an assistive device to help him be able to communicate his needs and wants.

The Kansas Public Schools are making so many advances in providing services and individualized education to every child and the phasing in of the Gannon funding has been a life line for so many children and families. It is reassuring that we are collectively doing what is needed for our littlest Kansans.

At the same time, I have watched as a child close to my family has struggled with his own learning disability in a private school. His parents have had to pay out of pocket for his diagnosis and treatment planning. When they took the plan to the school, it was basically dismissed by his teacher who "forgot" about his diagnosis between his parent/teacher conferences. They were informed that special services would need to be sought at the local public school and that receiving assistance would require him to be bussed back and forth. They are currently considering moving their son to a public school as they realize the private school does not see supporting the needs of their child as important or part of their mission.

Juxtaposing these experiences makes HB2550 an unconscionable option for our state. Public funding needs to be used to appropriately fund public schools. At a time when we as a state are all fighting so hard to bring our public schools in general and our special education (of note, SMSD has \$8 million in excess unfunded special education expenses) in particular up to

appropriate levels of funding, diverting funds from our public education harms not only the children but our standing nationally.

Public funds must stay with the public school system, the only schools required to accept every child regardless of need. Private schools are not required to accept all students – we have been discouraged from considering private schools because they can't and won't be able to provide the services and supports our son needs. These schools also are not required to be held to the same accountability and testing standards as public schools. The state has no control over what is done in private schools nor are they required to be accredited to a minimal standard. Funding through this bill is ripe with opportunity for fraud and misuse of funds.

I ask that you oppose bill HB2550.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sara A. Jahnke, Ph.D.  
Parent of SMSD Students  
Prairie Village, KS