

Senate Assessment and Tax Committee
Senate Bill 509
Opposition - Oral Testimony
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Dear Senate Assessment and Tax Committee Members,

I oppose SB 509. Tax credits for people who have children but do not use the public schools is akin to a tax credit for people who choose to buy books at a bookstore instead of using a library, or people who join a country club rather than use a public park. Why would the government incentivize people to use the private system, especially one in which there is no required oversight or accountability?

It is necessarily part of American society that people's experience of it will not be equal, but it is the government's job to ensure baseline access to the tools citizens need to better themselves, not to pick and choose who the winners and losers will be. Tax credits for students who attend private schools or who are homeschooled only serve to further enrich the already privileged and to drain resources from the public coffers, when we all know that public schools could use every penny of available funding.

I am in agreement with the testimony provided by KNEA, KASB, and the other education advocacy groups. We *know* these measures don't work to improve student academic performance or create opportunities for rural or urban students. We *know* academic tax credits create opportunities for fraud and are a drain on state financial and human resources. This bill would be especially egregious in terms of money spent. We can learn from other states on this issue, and we can save ourselves the embarrassment of making the same errors.

Finally, I would like to add my perspective to this as a public school teacher. We are facing a serious teacher recruitment and retention crisis. This is a real problem, rather than the manufactured issue of the burdensome cost of private school. I don't believe most of you truly want public schools to fail, but I do believe you have colleagues here in Topeka and in Washington DC who would absolutely love to permanently shutter public education as we know it. Each and every attempt in this body to pass a tax credit or a voucher or to micromanage the complicated system that is public schools is another shot fired at an institution that is already badly bleeding. We need your support - not your attacks. My students need you to believe in them and in their parents' decision to send them to public schools - they need resources and adults to help them, and currently we don't have enough of either. You *could* be working on fixing that. Please stop this cycle of undermining public schools and join with me and educators across the state in solving real problems.

Respectfully,

Liz Meitl, PhD.