



Testimony to House Education Committee HB 2263 – Special Needs Scholarship Program

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Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 2263. This bill is a very good step in the right direction of helping each individual child achieve in classroom. Kansas' public school teachers work hard every day and dedicate their lives help every child who comes through their classroom. Unfortunately, some children are still left behind.

Last fall, I had the opportunity to meet Phylicia, a young woman attending a private school in Tulsa, Okla., on a special needs scholarship. The scholarship in Oklahoma is called the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship Program and is named for the daughter of the Governor who signed the law. Phylicia attends a school of 160 students, the vast majority with some sort of special need. Before being granted this opportunity, she often hid in the bathroom of her local public school, was admitted to the hospital as a result of cutting herself, and struggled to learn and enjoy life as a teenager.

The difference in attending a private school that can focus on her Asperger's syndrome compared with her previous public school is best described by Phylicia herself: "I don't feel like I'm walking into a battle every time I go to school."

Contrast the experience of Phylicia with a young man named James in Wichita (this is not a personal story and James is not a reference to myself). James has dyslexia and was unable to find the help he needed in his public school. His parents have had to make sacrifices and rely on the aid of others to attend tutoring sessions with a dyslexia-specific tutor.

James is blossoming with this help, but his family has the means to obtain this private help. What about those students whose families do not have the means to pay or others willing to help them foot the bill?

HB 2263 is not an indictment of Kansas special education teachers; it is simply a recognition that some students do not find the options that suit their needs within our current system. This bill would help Kansas join the many other states, our southern neighbor being but one, that are willing to help meet the needs of each individual child.