



TESTIMONY

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HOUSE BILL 711: ESTABLISHES TRANSFER PROCEDURES TO NONRESIDENT DISTRICTS FOR STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Cory Koedel

Testimony Before the Missouri Senate Education Committee

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Cory Koedel and I am Director of Education Policy for the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Missouri-based think tank that advances sensible, well-researched, free-market solutions to state and local policy issues. The ideas presented here are my own and are offered in consideration of Missouri's educational environment.

Allowing for open enrollment is an effective way to give Missouri families more control over the schools that their children attend. While Missouri has been expanding other forms of school choice in recent years—e.g., through greater access to charter schools and the Empowerment Scholarship Account program (MOScholars)—these options are available to relatively few Missouri

families at present. Open enrollment is an appealing way to expand the scope of school choice because it leverages our existing public schools by simply allowing parents to choose the best school for their children within a reasonable distance from their home or work, regardless of school district boundaries. HB 711 would reform the existing system by allowing open enrollment in Missouri.

That said, there are several provisions in the bill that could be improved. First, all school districts should be required to participate. This would not mean that districts must accept *all* non-resident students who wish to enroll via open enrollment. However, with reasonable guardrails in place to protect against overcrowding, requiring all districts to participate will give Missouri families more choices. Research on open enrollment policies shows that students tend to use them to move from low-

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performing districts to high-performing districts. This type of mobility is good for students and good for Missouri. But if the high-performing districts refuse to participate, the benefits of open enrollment are reduced.

Second, charter schools are not able to accept transfer students under the proposed legislation. Charter schools operate as independent local education agencies (LEAs) in Missouri and should not be excluded from parents' choices.

Third, the bill limits the percentage of students who can transfer out of a district to three percent of the district's enrollment. This provision protects low-performing districts and unduly punishes the students who attend them.

Open enrollment leverages the existing network of public schools in Missouri to provide more educational options to Missouri families. By creating a strong open enrollment program that allows Missouri students to cross district lines, the legislature can give families access to additional programming and additional learning environments without requiring them to move out of their homes. While this bill is a move in that direction, it could be improved.



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