SB 44 - Alternative Education Scholarship Combination 

(Senator Lincoln Fillmore, Rep. Candace Pierucci)

This bill combines the Carson Smith Scholarship and Special Needs Opportunity Scholarship Programs

| Utah PTA OPPOSES SB 44 |
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**Background:**

* This bill combines 2 existing scholarship programs into one, renames it the Carson Smith Opportunity Scholarship Program and specifies that it will be administered by a scholarship granting organization.
* The Special Needs Opportunity Scholarship was created in 2020 to provide private school scholarships for students with disabilities.
  + In 2022 the program was expanded to include siblings of students with disabilities as eligible scholarship recipients.
  + In 2023 the program was expanded to include transportation as an eligible expense.
  + In 2024, this bill expands eligibility to include home school and preschool students.
* The Carson Smith Scholarship Program was created in 2005 to provide private school scholarships to K-12 students with disabilities.
* Under the new combined program, these scholarships are intended to help students with disabilities (and their siblings) pay for eligible expenses such as private school tuition, materials, curriculum, technology, etc.

**What the bill does:**

* Allows donors to the scholarship fund to receive a tax credit for the full amount of their donation.
* Allows recipients to be awarded up to 2.5 times the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) amount.
* Allows the scholarship granting organization to spend up to 5% of donations on administrative costs and up to 3% on marketing and fundraising.
* Keeps tax money from going into the funds supporting public education.
* Requires scholarship applicants to:
  + Acknowledge that a private school may not provide the same level of disability services that are provided in a public school.
  + Deny their rights to services issued under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

**What the bill doesn’t do:**

* Does not require scholarship recipients to report on how money was spent
* Does not require recipients to report on how the funds are helping the student to progress.
* Does not follow up to understand if the funds are accomplishing the intended purpose.

**Questions to ask your legislator?**

* Why will the program be administered by an outside scholarship granting organization instead of by the Utah State School Board of Education?
* How will you know if these scholarships are actually helping students with disabilities?
* Why is there no accountability or follow-up on how these taxpayer funds are spent?
* How many students are these scholarships serving?

**Share your story:**

* Do you have a child with a disability?
* What has your experience been with getting IDEA services for your child in the public school or other settings?