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INTRODUCTION OF SENATE BILL 340
REMARKS TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
BY
SENATOR BARBARA K. CEGAVSKE

April 9, 2003

Thurs.
4:00 pm.
Finance
Becker
Wetsum

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

I would like to thank Debbie Cahill for the suggestion - I understood how we could help these students the school district could not help after her visit this was recommended special ed. \$15

- I am here today to present Senate Bill 340 addressing scholarships for pupils with disabilities.
- This bill is in skeleton form and so further work will be needed to put meat on its bones and I look forward to your comments and suggestions.
- This bill was modeled after a Florida program titled "McKay Scholarships" that provides scholarships for special education students in Florida.
- The McKay Scholarship Program was named after the President of the Florida Senate—John McKay.
- The McKay Scholarship Program was started in 1999 as a pilot project in Sarasota County and went statewide the next year. Almost 1,000 students participated in 2000-2001.
- The Florida program has continued to grow and—as evidence of its success—in 2001-2002 nearly 5,000 children with disabilities took advantage of the scholarships.
- You may also be interested to know that the Florida Department of Education reported that scholarship recipients represented the diversity of the state:
 - o 35 percent White;
 - o 36 percent African American; and
 - o 26 percent Hispanic.

- Like the McKay scholarships in Florida, this bill would offer an important option for parents of special education students who are not progressing in a public school setting.
- As we all know, special education students need individualized attention and education programs tailored to their needs and abilities and, despite their best efforts, that is not always possible in public schools.
- Simply stated, the bill allows parents who are dissatisfied with the progress that their special education student is making to obtain a scholarship from the state to help them afford tuition at a private school.
- In order to be eligible for a scholarship, a student must:
 - Have an individualized education program (IEP);
 - Have been enrolled in a public school the previous year; and
 - The private school must be located in Nevada.
- The amount of the scholarship is the per-pupil amount recognized by the Legislature in the county in which the pupil resides, OR, the amount of the private school's tuition, whichever is less.
- Although more detail is needed, the bill provides for the scholarship check to be made out to the parents and mailed to the private school. The parents would then endorse the check to the private school.
- This process is consistent with the procedures followed in other states that provide similar scholarships.
- This payment procedure ensures that the money is spent appropriately but that the parents are the ones making the decision about where to enroll their student.
- As a condition of continuing the scholarship, the pupil must remain in good standing at the private school and, if he or she fails to do so, then the scholarship will be forfeited.

- Finally, the bill makes clear that accepting students on state scholarships will not subject the private school to oversight by Nevada's Department of Education except as is necessary to ensure compliance with the terms of the bill.
- The bill also makes clear that the state will not incur any liability by reason of these scholarships.
- As I said before, there are details that need to be worked out but, if Florida can do it, then so can we.
How done it.
- A scholarship program like this gives parents a new voice in their child's education and gives children with special needs a better chance to succeed.
- I urge your support for this worthwhile bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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