



## **Kelly Urging Consideration Of Education Savings Accounts**

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Michigan's constitutional ban on using state funds for private K-12 schools is putting the state behind in the race to attract economic development, Rep. Tim Kelly said in launching his effort Thursday to reverse that ban.

Mr. Kelly (R-Saginaw Township) did not pretend sufficient support exists for HJR B that would allow education savings accounts for special education students. But he said the issue should at least be part of the discussion of reforming education in Detroit.

Jason Bedrick, a policy analyst for the Cato Institute whom Mr. Kelly brought in to bolster the case for the change, said education savings accounts are expanding around the country.

Mr. Bedrick pointed particularly to Arizona as a success story for implementing the accounts, which can be used for private school tuition or any other allowed educational need (including college tuition), noting the state's supreme court had overturned an earlier attempt to use vouchers.

Mr. Kelly said Michigan's Constitution was not likely so flexible. "If you could do it, it would have happened," he said.

As to removing the prohibition, he acknowledged that not only was he unlikely to see support from Democrats, but many members of his own caucus also would currently oppose the plan, which would need two-thirds majorities in both houses and then statewide voter approval.

But he said upcoming education reform discussions could open the door. "Detroit presents itself an opportunity to do something drastically different," he said.

Most of the ESA programs currently focus on special needs and low-income students. "In Detroit, you've got both," he said.

Mr. Kelly said one factor in improving schools, and the economy in general, in Detroit is attracting new jobs and investment. But he said the changing education environment in other states is making them more attractive.

“Why would I come to Detroit if I’m going to be told when and where my child goes to school?” he said.

Mr. Bedrick noted Michigan is surrounded by states that allow some form of vouchers.

“As of this year, more than half of states have some form of public school choice,” Mr. Bedrick said.

While he said it would be some years before data would back the value of ESAs, he said there is data showing improved performance for students using vouchers. And he said there is satisfaction data showing while fewer than half of parents were happy with their traditional school, all were now satisfied with the program they had available through the ESA.

Mr. Kelly said he did not anticipate any further hearings beyond the joint meeting Thursday of the House Education Committee and Appropriations School Aid Subcommittee directly on the issue of ESAs or the resolution, but he will be urging discussions on the issue.