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Be them scholarships or vouchers, bill moves forward

Rep. Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, made an impassioned defense before the House PreK-12 Policy Committee today for [HB453](#), his bill to expand a state school choice program that provides scholarships to children from low-income families.

Saying the Corporate Income Tax Credit Program has saved the state \$40 million with nearly 24,000 students participating, Weatherford said, "I can't think of a better program in the state of Florida when it comes to education."

Plenty of people in attendance appeared to disagree with that sentiment, including Democratic committee members Martin Kiar of Davie and Dwight Bullard of Miami.

Said Chris Ott, a kindergarten teacher from Alachua: "You guys are doing it on the cheap and it's killing us."

Discussion was robust and spirited before the committee voted 9-4 along party lines to advance the measure to the Education Policy Council.

"Voucher" was the contentious word, with Weatherford strongly saying that the money for this program "never touches the state treasury" and thus does not meet the definition of a voucher.

Still, it looks like there will be some more fights over this one.

Earlier, the House State Universities & Private Colleges Policy Committee sailed through five bills with unanimous votes including [HB75](#), to allow USF to add a pharmacy doctorate program, and a big one to watch this session: [HB403](#), Weatherford's bill to allow all state universities to charge a tuition differential.

-- Amy Hollyfield, Times Tallahassee staff

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