Tax credit scholarships helpful

By Ayesha Williams
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As a mother of three beautiful girls who use tax credit scholarships, I’m bothered that School Board member Eileen Roy sees the scholarship as “diverting funding away from public schools.” I see it as an investment in my daughters’ education.

Public schools may work great for many children, but the local public school wasn’t right for my daughters. It had too many unwanted distractions.

Now my girls, Tamani, Samaria and Azaria, attend St. Patrick Inter- parish School. The school offers a secure, structured environment with fewer distractions. It challenges my girls and holds them accountable for their actions and grades. I’m blessed to have them there, but I wouldn’t have been able to afford it without the scholarship.

I’m sure the parents of 78,000 other scholarship students feel the same. That’s why 10,000 people were at the rally in Tallahassee last month with Martin Luther King III. We wanted to tell the teachers union to drop the lawsuit to take away the scholarships. I know one judge already ruled against them, but they say they want the Florida Supreme Court to decide. We wanted them to see who they were hurting.

Roy thinks my choice hurts public schools (column, Jan. 31). I think she’s out of touch. No school, public or private, is entitled to my children. No school, public or private, is entitled to the money that follows my girls to the school of my choice.

She says if testing is so important, why is it only required in public schools? But my girls are tested each year. I know because the results are handed to me. I also know the results are sent to the state.

Roy also says the program is unregulated. How can anyone believe that? Private schools have to follow many rules. And if they’re not doing their job, parents can take their children out and find another school. Parents in many public schools wish they could do that.

And so what if many private schools are religious? No one is forced to donate to the scholarship program and no one is forced to choose a school. We’re a Pentecostal family attending a Catholic school, but everybody at St. Patrick respects us and treats us like family.

My choice is working for my daughters, and I made the choice because I love them and know what’s best for them. To anybody who is trying to take that away, please stop. Please respect our choice.

— Ayesha Williams lives in Gainesville. She is currently majoring in family, youth and community service at Santa Fe College and hopes to finish her degree at the University of Florida.