

## House vote expected on special needs money bill

By Mary Sell Montgomery Bureau | Posted: Tuesday, April 5, 2016 12:00 am

MONTGOMERY — A proposal to allow state money to follow students with special needs to private schools is expected to be the first bill voted on in the Alabama House when lawmakers return today.

House Bill 84 from Rep. Ken Johnson, R-Moulton, would give parents of children with special needs state money to attend non-public schools. Johnson, R-Moulton, said the bill would let parents access opportunities outside of their local school systems. He said it may be difficult for some small, rural systems to address students' needs.

The bill stipulates that to qualify, students with special needs must have an "individual education plan" within their district. The bill cites, but is not limited to, some specific disabilities, including speech, language, visual and physical impairments, and learning disabilities.

In 2014, 82,355 Alabama students had individual education plans, according to the Alabama Department of Education.

The bill caps new enrollment in the program at 1,000 new students per year. A fiscal note said it would cost the Education Trust Fund about \$4.7 million the first year, then could grow from there based on new enrollment.

Local school systems get to keep 10 percent of state funding.

State funding is about \$4,800 per student, according to the Alabama Department of Education.

Opponents of the legislation have said the money wouldn't be enough to help many families seeking other educational options, and would only help middle-class families, not poor ones.