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KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Mark Desetti  
Testimony, HB 2486  
House Education Committee  
February 1, 2016

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in opposition to House Bill 2486.

While we understand your concern about unpredictability of the appropriation of state funds for building projects, this bill raises some serious concerns for us.

We believe equity in state aid for school districts is a critical issue. The prior formula for school finance recognized this and the courts have upheld the concept. Bond and Interest State Aid is intended to assist property poor school districts in providing facilities for their students without a crushing local tax burden. You've heard it said that a child's education should not be determined by zip code. Equity provisions of school finance get to the heart of that statement.

There are many decisions that go into the issuance of a bond project. Bonds are issued by communities to ensure that students have modern, safe, and clean schools. Bond and Interest State Aid ensures that such schools are available to all Kansas children, not just those in property rich areas.

Members of this committee as well as school board members, school administrators, and parents have said that a good teacher is essential to a child's education. We agree with that. There are any number of things that teachers consider when choosing which districts to apply to or which to choose from among multiple offers.

Obviously there are compensation issues – salary, benefits, and retirement. But there are other issues as well. Teachers will tell you that teacher working conditions are a child's learning conditions. Modern school buildings with up-to-date technology, science labs, performance spaces, art studios, and athletic facilities are appealing to teachers. They want to teach in facilities that support a well-rounded education and provides their students with opportunities to participate and succeed. Great facilities attract great teachers. Bond and Interest State Aid ensures all districts can provide those great facilities.

We also believe that consideration of this bill in isolation is a problem. Kansas is in a school finance transition. There are court rulings to come and we are currently operating under a temporary funding scheme with the intent to write a new comprehensive school finance formula to replace the 1992 formula.

One of the criticisms we have often hear from legislators about the 1992 formula is that it had become a hodge-podge of amendments, fixes, and adjustments over the years. We question the wisdom of creating substantive new school finance law on Bond and Interest State Aid in isolation from the overall formula which is yet to be discussed. You may find that a review board is the right thing to do but we think the system and the state would be better served to craft a comprehensive system of school finance which includes addressing the issue of equity than to adopt a series of bills that may or may not work together.

Finally, I would suggest that the review board proposed in this bill is a good suggestion should you choose to pursue the idea. It includes legislators of both parties and members of the State Board of Education charged with the general supervision of our schools. Should the legislature decide to include such a review board in the next school finance formula, we believe you have crafted a good example in this bill.