

To: Committee on Taxation

Rep. Marvin KleeB, Chair

Date: February 23, 2015

Subject: House Bill No. 2169

My name is Ruth Ann Koepsel; I live at 210 South Dellrose Street, Wichita, KS, and am a retired special education teacher. My entire career of 32 years was spent in the Wichita Public Schools. For over 20 years, I served as the department chair for the special education departments at Wichita High School West, Southeast, and East. I am the Chair of Philanthropic Programs for the Assistance League® of Wichita (ALW) and am here today to speak in favor of House Bill 2169.

The Assistance League® is a national nonprofit founded in 1919 in Southern California to provide food and clothing for local families severely impacted by World War I. Since that time, chapters have been formed across the nation with a vision to empower volunteers to make lasting change through community based philanthropic programs. Locally, the Assistance League® supports four programs:

**Scholarships** – Vocational scholarships are awarded to USD 259 graduating seniors for programs at Wichita Area Technical College and Butler Community College. Scholarships have been awarded to 187 seniors since 1988.

**Sexual Assault Victim Support Program** – Clothing, footwear and necessary items are provided through the Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center to women, children and men who have been victims of sexual assault. Rather than leaving the hospital in paper scrubs after their clothing has been taken for investigation purposes, the victims are allowed to walk out with dignity in regular clothing. The program began in 1994. Approximately 350 individuals are served annually.

**Bear Hugs** – New teddy bears are provided to sexually abused children for comfort during examination by nurses in the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner/Sexual Assault Recovery Team program at Via Christi-St Joseph and Wesley. This program has provided 2,757 bears since it was started in 1997.

The signature philanthropic program of the Assistance League® is **Operation School Bell®**. Its purpose is to provide brand new clothing to children in the public schools whose families do not have the means to provide for them. Operation School Bell® began in Wichita 1985 when ALW began serving the Wichita Public Schools and this year, we are very proud to say that over 75,000 students have been clothed by our efforts. There is no denying the positive impact on a child's self-esteem when he/she can go to school knowing he looks as good as his peers; knowing she doesn't have to wear what her sister wore the day before; knowing he doesn't have to miss because he has no coat or shoes and it is cold and snowing. In the words of Bob Goodwin, long time Coordinator of Social Workers for the Wichita Public Schools: "It is critical for kids to feel good about themselves in order to learn and succeed. It does a tremendous amount for a child's self-esteem to be able to show up at school in adequate clothing. For many students, it is their first new set of clothing." I also call your attention to the written testimony of Loren Pack, L.S.C.S.W., Coordinator of Social Work Services, and Kay Dunlap, Operation School Bell® Chair, ALW.

Some areas of the economy may be improving, but the need for assistance on the part of our families continues to rise. These needs are identified by social workers, teachers, principals and nurses. Our community has been extremely supportive in helping us meet these needs. In 2013-2014, the budget for Operation School Bell® was \$196,500; we clothed 3,758 students, both uniform and non-uniform. It costs approximately \$100 to provide the following items for each child: two pairs of pants, two shirts, one sweatshirt, six pairs of socks, six pairs of underwear, one coat, and a voucher for one pair of shoes. Sometimes we encounter students whose sizes require special purchases which result in paying a significantly higher amount over the \$100. Our funds are raised through membership dues, fundraising events, grants, and the proceeds of our Thrift Shop. Our donors include Spirit AeroSystems Good Neighbor Fund, Capitol Federal, Ronald McDonald House Charities, as well as local churches and individuals. **We receive no United Way funds, have no paid staff, pay taxes on all in-state purchases, and all funds remain in Wichita.** Our donors give generously to support our mission; it is vital that every dollar go as far as possible to fulfill that mission. Every one of the 5,000 pairs of pants, 5,000 shirts, 2,700 sweatshirts, 11,000 pairs of underwear, 12,000 socks, 1,800 coats, and 2,300 pairs of shoes that we purchased this year went directly into the hands of a child and his/her family. Taxing those purchases – new clothing that is given free to needy children – results in taking money away from serving more children.

For this reason, the Assistance League® of Wichita respectfully asks for your support by including the Assistance League® of Wichita in House Bill 2169.