



1300 SW Topeka Blvd
Topeka, Kansas 66612
(785) 235-0262

lochs@aftks.org

Testimony IN OPPOSITON to SB 212
Before the Senate Commerce Committee
Wednesday, March 12, 2015

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lisa Ochs, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 212. AFT-Kansas is a federation of unions whose members are City employees, University employees, State employees, law enforcement, teachers, and nurses. AFT-Kansas opposes SB 212 because it is an unnecessary and unfair bill that targets the hardworking public employees of our state. The bill would silence the free speech of working families by stripping them of the ability to pay voluntary union dues through payroll deduction, while leaving other membership organizations and companies free to use payroll deduction. The true purpose of this bill is not to protect workers or the interests of these public employees, but to weaken their collective voice.

SB 212 is unnecessary: Union members choose whether to join the union, set their own dues, elect their own leaders and vote on how and where their money will be spent. Because Kansas is a so-called “right to work” state, all union membership is completely voluntary here. No employee can pay union dues, fees, or assessments without voluntarily and freely signing a union card. No one is coerced or forced to join. Moreover, an employee can always drop his or her membership, or organize fellow employees to decertify the union, if he or she becomes dissatisfied with the union. Thus, this bill does not create any new rights for employees to control their paychecks. SB 212 is a solution to a problem that doesn’t exist.

Instead, the bill bans a process that puts minimal administrative burdens on the state. The Kansas Division of Budget, in the bill’s fiscal note, found that the bill would save an unknown amount of staff time now required to process payroll deductions, most likely because the time is so minimal. In fact, our unions pay a small fee for the processing of payroll deductions every two weeks. The supporters of these types of bills conveniently do not discuss these facts. Current law and procedure already protects employees and does not place a significant burden on the state. This bill does nothing but create

unnecessary barriers to the ability of organized workers to participate in workplace decision-making and policy debates.

SB 212 is unfair: Payroll deductions are something that insurance companies, charities, and credit unions all do and will be allowed to *keep* doing. For example, the United Way often partners with employers to solicit donations at the workplace and use payroll deduction to collect donations. Workplace solicitation for United Way campaigns is often performed by an employee's supervisor, a situation with far more potential for coercion than an individual's co-worker asking him or her to join the union. While the United Way is a good cause and one that our national union and AFT affiliates have strongly supported, it does not make sense that employees can be solicited in the workplace to give to a charity with payroll deduction, but cannot make the conscious choice, *without* workplace solicitation, to assign funds to a union.

SB 212 silences—and will drive away—the frontline public employees on which Kansas families depend. Our communities depend on public employees. That includes the AFT members who teach and care for our children, who provide public services that keep our communities safe and vibrant, and who treat our families when we are sick or injured. We need these dedicated public employees to *stay* in Kansas, contributing to the quality of life here and spending their hard-earned money in their local economies—not leave for better opportunities and greater respect elsewhere. Silencing and driving away the people on the frontlines of public service does a disservice, not only to them, but to the people of Kansas who count on public employees as watchdogs for quality and safety. Instead of attacking hard-pressed working families, our legislature should focus on bringing back lost jobs and restoring an economy that works for all Kansans—not just a few. We call on you to stop the distractions and divisions—and invest in Kansas again.