



Senate Committee on Ways and Means
January 29, 2015
SB 71

Chairman Masterson, Vice Chairman Denning, Ranking Member Kelly and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear on SB 71. I am Dr. Julie Ford, Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools, USD 501. Attached to my testimony, you will find some demographic and other information about our district and its patrons, as well as the USD 501 school board's legislative platform for 2015.

Before I address the devastating financial impact this proposal will have on our district, I need to address its effective date, which is the current fiscal year, FY2015. Our school budget and mill levy for this year have already been established. Governor Brownback's budget recommendations fund these obligations for the current year, and we support that component of his budget proposal for FY2015.

Our early estimates predict a loss of \$897,501 in supplemental general state aid between now and July 1, 2015, if SB71 is enacted because we are one of the districts that has less wealth due to assessed valuation per pupil. These resources are used to hire teachers, counselors, social workers and other staff to serve our 13,867 students, of which 77% live in poverty and receive free or reduced lunches. This cut would have devastating consequences to the students and their families in Topeka Public Schools.

The equalization of Supplemental State Aid assist communities with lower assessed valuation per pupil. The bill's application to the current year's budget would apparently shift the burden for the loss of these funds to our local property tax payers, however, it's timing would not allow district's to pursue that option. Even more importantly, the impact would be disproportionate, because a new mill levy would require our patrons to pay more than the districts with higher property wealth to obtain the same resources. In short, our patrons would be more heavily taxed than other wealthier districts in the State.

Our school board and management team have been commended for our innovations in financing and budgeting as we have endured the past few years of financial difficulty and uncertainty. SB 71 would be financially devastating, and would leave us with limited options. We are also concerned about delay in Capital Outlay State Aid, for Topeka Public Schools that amounts to 2.2 million dollars. It is our understanding the State may not have adequate cash flow to make its scheduled February payment, and could delay this distribution to as late as mid-June. Will our school board be forced to take drastic action because of cuts in Supplemental State Aid and

delays in payments such as reducing school days, lay off staff, non-paid furloughs or reduce programs for students in the middle of the year?

We continue to believe that the State has a revenue problem which has created a budget short-fall. We hope to gain further clarity as to how districts should manage the impact of this proposal and other school finance proposals. Thank you for the opportunity to appear on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Julie Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Julie Ford
Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools