



Testimony to House Education Committee

HB 2221 – Enacting the Equal Access Act

February 11, 2013

James Franko, Vice President / Policy Director

Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 2221, which simply provides teachers the opportunity to learn about different professional development services and liability insurance options that may serve their needs.

One hundred years ago, America's first progressive president, Teddy Roosevelt, earned a place in history and the nickname "Trust Buster." His political career was spent breaking up the monopolies that stifled innovation, artificially inflated prices, and manipulated markets. America recognized that freedom of commerce, by stopping the bad actions of some, would allow for better service at lower prices.

The bill before you today aims to achieve the same goal. It offers a freedom to teachers that is currently hard for them to realize. HB 2221 does nothing aside from level the playing field upon which different groups may offer needed services to the ladies and gentlemen who dedicate their lives to our state's most essential priority – educating our children.

Some may argue that this bill would create chaos in local districts as multiple groups begin offering their services to teachers. A building principal is certainly capable of managing a slightly-more cluttered bulletin board. Regardless, administrators having to field more than one request should not trump teachers' easy access to professional information.

In one sense, it may have been easier essentially having one choice for kerosene in Rockefeller's Standard Oil. But, Americans were not free to make choices amongst different companies helping them heat and light their homes.

Today's discussion is about offering teachers the right to choose as they work to help Kansas kids succeed and grow. The Kansas-NEA or American Federation of Teachers are

not being denied access in any way. They will still have full access to e-mail, mailboxes, and teacher meetings. Others will simply have the same.

I have complete confidence in the ability of teachers to choose services that best suit their needs. We entrust them with our young people and should entrust them with the choice of liability insurance or professional development services as well. Today, by law and by practice, that choice is essentially forbidden.

I have complete confidence in the ability of local education administrators to manage the multiple vendors that may want to help teachers better complete their jobs. We should not put these dedicated professionals in the position of having to tell one group they cannot speak to teachers at the expense of another.

Kansans are rightly concerned when they see government grant special treatment to a favored business or entity. Regardless of industry, political party, or circumstance, government sanctioned monopolies raise eyebrows. At the end of the day, all most Kansans ask for is a level playing field. This bill ensures that -- nothing more, nothing less.