

**Karen Godfrey, Kansas NEA President**  
**Senate Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development**  
**February 5, 2013**  
**Testimony on HB 2023**

Dear Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about House Bill 2023, a bill that threatens our teachers' ability to advocate for our students and schools.

I'm speaking to you first as an English teacher of over thirty years in the Seaman district in the northern part of Topeka, as a former local president, and a former local negotiator. I'm currently on leave to serve as President of Kansas National Education Association where our focus is on providing great educational opportunities for every child in Kansas.

You have heard a summary of this bill and have undoubtedly read or seen some of the responses to it in the media. I would like to clear up some misconception related to this bill and others that will soon come to you.

Let me first address misconceptions about what we do. The majority of teachers in Kansas choose to join our association. We encourage our colleagues to join and help us advocate for what is best in our district and in our state for the students we serve. We don't bully them or ignore them if they choose not to join. In many districts, we have also earned the right to represent the bargaining unit. We take our right and our obligation to represent the bargaining unit seriously. We work for the best solutions for the group as a whole—that includes kids and staff. Our perspective provides valuable insight for decisions that impact our students.

Let me also address some misconceptions about what this bill would do. Many argue it only impacts our KPAC contributions. Our KPAC contribution is a voluntary contribution to our direct political work. It is completely separate from our membership dues; however, most members choose to contribute and use the convenience of payroll deduction offered by their district. Once it is a part of our paycheck, it should be our money to use as we choose and not restricted by the government. Several members choose not to contribute, and several members choose to use other methods to contribute significantly more.

This bill has a much broader reach, however. Let me give some examples of how it would also affect our general membership dues. If a district is considering an alternative setting for students who are not succeeding in the traditional setting, teachers have valuable insight. The local calls members together, orders pizza, and talks about the pros and cons and how they might present the issue to the patrons of the district. That's political activity funded with dues dollars.

Perhaps a district's school board is considering cutting counselors or nurses from its elementary schools. Teachers are concerned that students' needs won't be met. They contact one of our staff for the best information available on the need for those services and help in preparing for a presentation to the Board – that's political activity funded with dues dollars.

The middle school in a district is overcrowded. Our members again have firsthand insight into such a situation. The local association newsletter lets members know of some public forums they might want to attend to provide their perspective to the public. That is dues dollars at work. This bill denies our right to use dues collected through payroll deduction in this manner. Why? Why should our right to speak up for education be restricted in this way?

I think as you consider this bill and any that may arise in the future regarding our association, it would help to remember that you are talking about the majority of the teachers in Kansas. We have joined

together for a variety of reasons, from a sense of professional responsibility, to a desire for resources and networks, to an interest in pooling our resources and energy to advocate for kids and schools. These bills impact us at the core of who we are. These bills feel like a vindictive attack.

I'd like to share some excerpts from a recent Facebook posting from one of our members when this bill passed in the House. She first explained how the local association advocates for everything from curriculum adoption to adequate staff from counselors to paraprofessionals. She then described her role:

*I am a teacher. I am preparing the next generation of Kansas workers, tax-payers, and voters. . . I am helping YOUR children develop the skills needed for whatever the next page in their life adventure holds.*

*I am a teacher. I am not a thug. I am not the enemy. I am a hardworking, tax-paying, Kansas voter. I am a member of a union that speaks on behalf of myself, my colleagues, and YOUR CHILDREN. We did not flood the statehouse today, because we were too busy doing our jobs.*

*I am a teacher. I am molding the best hopes for our future. Kansas legislators . . . showed today how little regard they have for that future.*

*I am a teacher, and I am crying.*

I too am a teacher and I too am crying. But we will wipe our tears and do whatever we can to fight for the opportunities our kids and teachers deserve. Because that is who we are and what we do.

Thank you for your time, and I would be glad to answer questions.