



Testimony before the
Committee
On
House Commerce
By
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lisa Ochs, and I am the President of AFT-Kansas. We are teachers, city, county and State employees, university employees, police officers, and nurses who provide critical public services in each of Kansas's 105 counties. I thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today on HB 2326.

AFT-Kansas opposes HB 2326 because it is an unnecessary and confusing change to the existing labor relations processes in the state. The bill would undermine professional organizations as the exclusive voice for teachers with their employers and limit some of the negotiable items an organization could bargain over.

The contract between labor and management establishes a common set of rules of the road. We believe that the system is working in Kansas to the benefit of both labor and management, and efforts to create parallel structures are unnecessary and will be a distraction from the real tasks that face us. Namely, how will teachers and school administrators work together to improve student learning.

Taken together, we fear the provisions of this bill will lead to downward pressures on teachers pay and benefits. Unions were created because experience tells us that when individual employees are each on their own, they are far less likely to speak up for themselves on issues ranging from pay to workplace safety. Saying that the ability to make your own deal is an "opportunity" for workers is the same as saying that going into a casino is an "opportunity." Some workers may prosper, but in the long run, the house wins.

A union provides a way for workers and management to come together on issues and part of making that happen are the majoritarian and exclusive representation processes by which the union operates. Undermining those processes has the potential to be divisive, setting workers against each other. Kansas current average salaries for teachers are far below national averages, hardly a good strategy to attract and retain effective educators. And the advantage of having a well paid teaching force spill over into the community. Research shows that strong unions raise non union worker wages. Moreover, teachers provide an economic stimulus to their communities because they tend to spend their money where they live.

Finally, this bill further puts the state out of step with top performing countries. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides the most comprehensive research and analysis of indicators that measure the quality of teaching

and learning around the globe. In its study, "Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education Lessons From PISA For the United States," OCED noted "The fact is that many of the countries with the strongest student performance also have the strongest teachers' unions, beginning with Japan and Finland. There seems to be no relationship between the presence of unions, including and especially teachers' unions, and student performance. But there may be a relationship between the degree to which the work of teaching has been professionalised and student performance. Indeed, the higher a country is on the world's education league tables, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners." (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/46623978.pdf>)

Accordingly, we believe that you should listen to the collective voice of teachers and vote against this bill. Instead of stripping teacher of the few rights they have left, the legislature should focus on the chronic underfunding of schools, which deny students access to access to quality early childhood education, smaller class sizes, a rich curriculum, and sufficient support services.