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House Education Committee
Sue Mollenkamp, Committee Assistant

Dear Members of the House Education Committee:

My comments relate to your hearing on House Bill 2378, which will be discussed on Wednesday and Thursday of this week.

As the 1999 Kansas Teacher of the Year, I strenuously oppose passage of this bill, and I am offended that the legislature would attempt to dismantle one of the premier Teacher of the Year programs in the entire nation. The Kansas Department of Education, Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker, and numerous corporate entities and foundations have worked for decades to establish an exemplary recognition program for Kansas teachers called the Kansas Teacher of the Year Program [KTOY], and it works smoothly and unpolitically to honor outstanding teachers in our state. It is aligned with the National Teacher of the Year Program through CCSSO [Council of Chief State School Officers]. The KTOY program is not broken, and we do not need a legislative take-over to replace it. My specific objections are based on the following:

The current nomination process, through the Kansas Department of Education, is well-defined and strenuous; however, there is no process outlined in the bill. This would be determined by the committee. We have no idea how the process would work – or if it would work. Again, the current process works fine each year. It doesn't need to be changed!

The 13 member committee does not come close to representing the current diversity among the large KTOY selection committee. Political appointments do not sit well with the general public right now, and having the voice of only ONE teacher is extremely callous.

While cash incentives are fine, there is no guarantee of annual funding being available, so "the committee shall reduce the number of program awards for teachers..." Currently, the KTOY program guarantees funding for the program annually. With the pitiful state of the Kansas economy and the slashes that have been made to education in our state, I cannot imagine that there will be \$330,000 yearly for the Kansas legislature to fully fund the awards to teachers and schools, in addition to other expenses to be incurred by this new program.

If the new legislative award for teaching excellence is approved, Kansas will most likely be eliminated from the National Teacher of the Year program because all programs are

administered through the states' departments of education and overseen by CCSSO. It is unlikely that this new approach will be recognized by CCSSO and would, therefore, eliminate any future Kansas Teacher of the Year. I would hate for that legacy to end because Kansas has had six finalists for National Teacher of the Year.

Lastly, I oppose this bill because it focuses on money as the "award" rather than the opportunities to grow and network with other outstanding teachers across the state and nation. Our current KTOY program allows the 8 members of the KTOY team as well as regional finalists from all four Congressional districts to travel, speak, network, and grow professionally, not only in the year of honor, but also in subsequent years. Through KEEN (Kansas Exemplary Educators Network) and NNSTOY (National Network of State Teachers of the Year), our Kansas teachers are growing professionally long after the "honor" year. In my case, I look forward to attending the KEEN and NNSTOY conferences 16 years after my recognition, and I have teaching friends all across the country. I see no provision for any of this growth in the proposed bill.

I am in total support of elevating the teaching profession and honoring teachers for what they do each day, and I feel that the Kansas Teacher of the Year program does exactly that—in a neutral, successfully-established fashion. This bill destroys everything that has been established and replaces it with a piece of paper with no guarantee of direction, process or funding. If the legislature would put the proposed money into the current program, it would help to expand our efforts. But to eliminate the program and any similar ones would be thoughtless.

I urge you to reject this bill for five reasons:

- 1) It is not well-thought out in terms of administration, nomination, recognition, and oversight
- 2) It eliminates a well-established, highly-regarded recognition program for Kansas teachers
- 3) It is based on money and not professional growth for the awardees
- 4) It would never be fully funded
- 5) It simply is not needed

Thank you for allowing me to submit my comments. I am unable to attend the hearings because of work commitments. I sincerely hope that you hear the voices of teachers as you make your decision about this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Strickland". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Carol Strickland