

To: House Education Committee, Ron Highland, Chairman

From: Ryan Flickner, Senior Director of Public Policy, Kansas Farm Bureau

Date: Feb. 3, 2016

Re: HB 2504, **School District Realignment**

Chairman Highland and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 2504, regarding school district realignment. Kansas Farm Bureau represents over 40,000 farm and ranch families who live and work in rural communities in all 105 counties across our state.

Kansas Farm Bureau has clear policy on the organization of Kansas schools:

“The state should not mandate consolidation of districts but should develop incentives for districts which choose to consolidate with adjoining districts. Any consolidation effort should be the result of discussions between the Boards of Education of the affected school districts. Those discussions should include opportunities for public comment and input. No consolidation should occur without the agreement of the majority of each of the affected Boards of Education. Where efficiencies can be achieved, we encourage districts to develop partnerships with neighboring districts.”

Throughout rural Kansas, K-12 schools serve not only as the educational center and cultural hub but in many cases also provide a strong sense of pride and belonging within the local community. Many of these schools offer a well-rounded, quality education rural Kansans cherish. Kansas Farm Bureau supports efficiencies when and where appropriate, but the decision to realign or consolidate school districts is best left to local school boards and their constituents.

Rural Kansans’ interest in the continued health of the state’s K-12 education system prompted Kansas Farm Bureau to establish a member-driven Education Working Group. This task force, which represents school districts of all enrollment and geographic sizes across the state, is examining K-12 education funding and structure with an eye toward finding solutions that work for all Kansas school districts. We appreciate the Legislature’s work on this complicated issue and stand ready to assist.