

Madam Chair and members of the committee:

My name is Beth Watson, and I am a member of the USD 289 Board of Education in Wellsville, KS. We are a small community who works diligently to give our kids the best public education we possibly can. We have come to a time though that our buildings need some significant repair and remodel. I have served on the BOE since 2011. During the years I have served we have had numerous funding struggles as a small rural district. Although we have had to make some very difficult cuts to staff and programs, we tried to minimize them as much as possible. We have focused our resources trying to keep as many quality educators and programs as possible in place which has meant that our facilities did not always receive the attention they needed. But we have come to a point that our facilities needs must be addressed.

While our district may appear to be wealthier in 2021 than in 2000 due to increased valuations in our district, the reality is that housing prices have increased substantially placing further burden on the average homeowner. This has created an equity issue for districts such as USD 289 in terms of addressing facility needs through the use of bonds. With rising construction costs and assessed valuations rapidly rising in our area, SB 31 will provide support and relief to both the local taxpayer and school district as they work together to provide facilities for students.

For the past 18 months, the USD 289 Facilities Committee has been working together to identify and prioritize facility needs as part of our long range facilities plan. The committee has come up with a plan to make the needed replacements, repairs and updates to our current buildings which are in great need. The current list of needs is much larger than what can be funded through Capital Outlay or an Energy Project. The Facilities Committee and Board of Education have worked extremely hard to prioritize vital facility needs versus wants. We also have worked to fund them in a manner that maximizes taxpayers' investments in the district while being very conscious of the impact on the individual taxpayer.

The changes to KSA 72-5462 have created an equity issue for school districts when it comes to funding facility improvements and upgrades. SB 31 goes a long way to address the equity issue currently in KSA 72-5462.

Thank you for your consideration.

Beth Watson
USD 289 Board Member