

Keara Richardson

Proponent Senate No. Bill 128

Written-Only Testimony

Thank you for allowing my testimony today. My name is Keara Richardson. I am a teacher and administrator of a nonaccredited private school, commonly known as a homeschool and have been for 12 years. Today I would like to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 128. I am located in Sharon Springs, Wallace County, KS in a very rural area of the state, here on the blessed western side. That comes with more perks than I can mention, but one thing it does NOT come with is a variety of educational choices. There are basically two: 1) your local public school or 2) homeschool.

My family chose to forego our local public school option and homeschool for a variety of reasons. The most profound factor was our concern that our values as people of faith, as a family and even as Americans were being undermined. This option has been an incredible path for us, but I can't say that it has been without financial limitations. Ultimately, our choices have to submit to a one-income budget, so that often means buying part of a curriculum instead of its entirety, limiting field trips and being very creative in a lot of areas. My high school students are still waiting on funds for a microscope and have had to put off online courses of interest. But what I have found to be most regrettable is not having the support to work together with others who are seeking educational alternatives.

Our local homeschool cooperative does a good job creating meaningful educational opportunities for all the children in our area, not just homeschoolers, but funding is often a struggle. Even buying supplies for projects for our monthly meetings can be difficult. We struggle to expand on those opportunities with things like online courses, special tutors, music and choir instructors or even part-time school options. Athletics, a beloved pastime of the communities I live in, are almost exclusively attached to the public school. In my family's experience, the cost of starting any athletic group and modestly paying staff makes the participation fees almost, if not totally, cost prohibitive. That's to mention nothing of the cost of traveling sometimes up to five hours to find other athletic groups you are even allowed to compete against.

If someone finds themselves dissatisfied with the public school district, but doesn't feel that homeschooling is a good fit, another option is to drive to the nearest private school which is one hour away, even more for some. As you can imagine, this is a logistical nightmare. Of course, that's if you can afford, out-of-pocket, the cost of private school tuition to begin with. Many of the families in our county are one-income homes. This is a virtual impossibility, especially for lower income families or families with multiple children.

I think this bill sends a message to Kansans that a child's education is important and valuable no matter where they receive it. It communicates that parents are best equipped to make decisions regarding their child's education and empowers them to do so. It will assist parents in creating opportunities, if necessary, for their child and to partner with those they choose to give their children a high quality, individually tailored education. It takes a very important step toward educational freedom which I believe will unleash parents and educators to serve our children far better in the future. I heartily support SB 128. I hope you will too. Thank you for your time.