

Written Testimony to House K-12 Education Budget Committee
Honorable Chair, Representative Kristey Williams
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Oppose House Bill 2395 A bill that amends The Kansas School Equity and Enhancement Act and other statutes related to the education of elementary and secondary students, as well as making appropriations to the Department of Education.

By Claire M. Reagan: Olathe resident, parent of current Olathe Public Schools Early Childhood student, parent of future Olathe Public Schools student, and public as well as private school teacher

Honorable Chairperson Williams and Committee Members,

Thank you for giving citizens the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 2395. This testimony is on behalf of my children and other Kansas children who currently or will one day attend our much sought after public schools. I write this based on my experience as both a parent and a teacher. Just so you know, it's now 12:18AM on Thursday morning. After a full day and with work in the morning (I teach AP English to 11th & 12th graders), you'd think I'd be tucked into bed. Unfortunately, with my own two toddlers sleeping, I find myself unable to shut off my thoughts, my thoughts about their future. So, I am writing you at this late hour to respectfully request that you not pass HB 2395 out of committee.

There are many pieces of the bill that trouble me for many reasons; however, here are my main concerns: It lowers base aid per pupil, will not continue the additional base aid increases recommended by the State Board of Ed in 2022 and 2023, removes the required 92% funding target for special education, allows for a scholarship program that utilizes public funds to pay tuition to private schools, and does nothing to address inflation (which is what has kept our state in litigation for far too long).

What I'm most concerned about, though, is the timing of this bill's introduction as it seems like SB 142 is much farther along in the process and its hearings afforded all stakeholders time to appropriately prepare thoughtful and thorough testimony. I can tell you from experience that nothing done at the last minute is done to the best of one's ability – I learned this both during my own education and while teaching teenagers here in Johnson County the last twelve years. In order for you as committee members to make well-informed decisions, you need the best information available – that is a tall order when a bill is formally introduced at 3:30PM one day and testimony is due by 10AM the next.

As far as the aforementioned issues I have with HB 2395, the one most troubling to me is the removal of the required 92% funding target (as stated on page 35, lines 13-14) and replacing it with an annually determined “...*excess cost percentage based on the amount of funds appropriated for the current school year for special education and related services*” (as stated on page 37, lines 19-21). Although there hasn't been a mandated percentage or amount of appropriated funds for special education, a concrete percentage target set a high bar that we have

striven to reach. Unfortunately, this new language leaves some of our most vulnerable as well as most gifted students in a precarious position. This funding is especially important to our family because our 4 year old son lives with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); his ASD diagnosis has impacted our lives in many ways, but the resources available to us through our public school district have made a life-changing difference for him and our family as a whole. Olathe schools put our minds and our hearts at ease from day one. As you may know, ASD can also come with some beautiful strengths and aptitude; I would hate for his full potential to be left unachieved because our high ability learners aren't receiving the opportunities they also deserve in our Kansas public school classrooms. Special education covers a wide range of student needs and leaving the state without a clear expectation of funding is not what our children deserve.

All Kansas kids should have the opportunities that well-funded public education can afford them and access to resources they may not otherwise receive. The fact that Kansas is one of only twelve states that currently spends less on education than it did prior to the recession is not a badge of honor. So, I implore you to please support legislation that will provide the necessary adjustment for inflation by opposing HB 2395 and following through on the already heard, already vetted SB 142.

It is with the utmost respect and appreciation for what our great state has provided our family thus far that I appeal to you now on the behalf of Evan Alex Reagan, a boy who has yet to become who we all know he is meant to be, and Abbie Michelle Reagan, a typical two year old who hasn't yet started her education journey.

Doing right by our children is humanity's most sacred covenant; I trust you will proceed with their very best interest in mind.

Thank you for your careful consideration,

Claire M. Reagan
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p.s. It is now 1:11AM