



WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY

**Sarah LaFrenz, President
American Federation of Teachers - Kansas
Senate Committee on Commerce
15 March 2022**

Oppose SB 511

Chairperson Erickson and members of the Committee,

As President of AFT Kansas and the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE), I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony strongly opposing SB 511, as we have opposed every attempt to pass versions of this bill over the past four years.

AFT Kansas is a federation of several public employee organizations, including the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE), the Kansas University Nurses' Association (KUNA), the United Teachers of Wichita (UTW), and others. The federation represents workers on the frontlines of the pandemic response, including corrections officers, health care workers, teachers, snowplow drivers, and more. Our number one priority has been working with state and local officials to ensure that public employees have the safest possible working conditions so they can carry on with the essential jobs they do for the public.

Over the last several months we have heard a lot from politicians that we have to protect our workers from burdensome government mandates. We have heard very clearly that mask and vaccine mandates infringe on our rights, because they contend it's not the government's place to tell people what to put on their face or put in their blood. We guess that concern was just a bunch of hot air though, since this bill is all about the government telling people how to spend their hard-earned paychecks and mandating anti-union propaganda. So much for giving people the freedom to decide for themselves.

Unions are entrusted by Kansas law with the responsibility of representing these covered employees whether or not they pay dues to our organizations — since 1958, the Kansas constitution has been clear that dues are strictly voluntary. Because so many members do, in fact, elect to join the union and volunteer a part of their paycheck, we have been able to proudly and effectively fulfill these representational duties for over sixty years.

In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled in *Janus v. AFSCME* that dues to public employee unions must be voluntary in all states, not just in those states, like Kansas, that had elected to do so. This decision changed nothing in Kansas.

Kansas Association of Public Employees/AFT-Kansas

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The proponents of this bill say that the intent of this bill is to bring the state into compliance with the court's ruling in *Janus*, but the bill does not have that effect. Again, Kansas has been in compliance with the court's ruling sixty years before the court had even conceived of its opinion in *Janus*.

No matter the bill's intent, its actual effect is to attack frontline workers in the most vulnerable moment of their careers as public servants. It is a blatant attempt to silence workers' voices to fight for better and safer working conditions, better wages, and a better life for our families.

This bill does not give workers more rights. Instead, it violates both our freedom of choice and our freedom of speech. It is bad for our democracy, bad for the working people of Kansas, and bad for our communities.

This bill solves no problems. Instead, it creates a logistical mess for both employees and employers right as we need them to maintain their focus on keeping Kansans safe. No one, worker or supervisor, is interested in additional, burdensome legislative mandates.

This bill is not Kansas legislation. It was not requested by Kansas workers. In fact, all previous attempts at passing this bill have failed, and were opposed by every labor organization in the state, including KNEA, Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police, IBEW, Kansas State Council of Firefighters, AFL-CIO, AFT-Kansas and KOSE, WKA, and the Teamsters.

The bottom line is that your paycheck is yours to handle as you choose. It is not the legislature's job or right to tell you how to spend your money.

On behalf of AFT Kansas and the working people we represent, I urge the committee not to pass SB 511.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

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