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Written Testimony – Opponent
House Committee on Education
House Bill 2700
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Chairperson Thomas, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 2700.

Taskforce Makeup

Kansas NEA is concerned about the makeup of the taskforce. HB 2700 calls for a minimum of four members of the taskforce to be politicians. This number would grow to five if the Speaker of The House chooses to select a local school board member as his/her 3rd appointment. Additionally, the bill only calls for the appointment of one librarian to be on the board. The imbalance of practitioners versus politicians is concerning. We have been consistently vocal about the need to include practitioners in the process of making policy. This issue is no different.

Implications of Academic and Intellectual Freedom and a Slippery Slope to Censorship

Kansas NEA believes that academic freedom is essential to the teaching profession. Academic freedom includes the rights of educators and learners to explore and discuss divergent points of view. We believe that controversial issues should not be excluded from the learning environment when, in the judgement of the professional staff, the issues are appropriate to the curriculum and the maturity level of the student.

KNEA supports intellectual freedom by opposing any curriculum or policy that denies freedom of thought and expression or any efforts to impose censorship upon any classroom or library mediums. Oversight of material in school libraries is warranted. However, it must take place responsibly. Given the above concerns regarding the makeup of the taskforce, Kansas NEA is worried that politics will take precedence over practical matters. Taskforce members may be tempted to make less than ideal decisions that are rooted in political pressure instead of what is in the best interest of the student learner. Politically based decisions could easily prove to be harmful to academic and intellectual freedom and even lead to blatant censorship.

Processes Already Exist

The debate over curriculum, classroom materials, school library materials, and the like, is not new. There are countless examples of differing views, opinions, and outcomes. The one consistent fact is that there are processes in place. Often times these bills are predicated on the notion that a process does not exist, or worse, that educators are acting out of inappropriate motives. These notions are almost always false and hurtful to those educators that are committed to excellence.

This issue is quintessentially local in nature. We strongly believe that the processes in place have been established with a great deal of professional thought and should be the outlet for these concerns. Legislative action is an overreach.

Kansas NEA has asked a few educators to provide testimony today in the attempt to extract this issue from the hot national debate that it has become and insert Kansas voices into the conversation. We hope that you will consider what they have to say in their testimony, we ask the committee to oppose HB 2700, but we do hope to continue with a positive dialogue that could result in an understanding that could possibly prevent the feeling that a process like the one laid out in SB 2700 is even necessary.

We thank you again for your time.