



Timothy R. Graham
Director of Government Relations & Legislative Affairs
Written Testimony – Oppose
House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
House Bill 2594
January 29, 2024

Chairperson Williams, Members of the Committee:

KNEA does not oppose the creation of a taskforce to start the important discussions regarding school funding. In the spirit of collaboration, we would love to stand before you as a neutral conferee on HB 2594. Unfortunately, we are forced to oppose HB 2594 for the following reasons:

- The failure to specifically include a classroom teacher on the new task force.
- The abolition of the Special Education and Related Services Funding Task Force

Teacher/Educator Inclusion

KNEA has been very vocal about our disappointment with not being included in discussions regarding issues that impact public education. We are certainly not prevented from testifying in the traditional sense of the process. However, we are not often consulted as a resource to help on the front-end. KNEA has been perpetually stuck in a react and respond posture that frequently results in opposition to many bills that are before this legislature. We are frequently forced to oppose bills that we could have helped fix and pass had we been included up front. This consistent exclusion creates unnecessary hard feelings and disillusionment with the process.

Industry, business, and representatives of other professional organizations have regularly had the privilege of direct involvement, up front, in legislation that impacted their given fields. This practice is appropriate. Some examples are the Highway Contractor's Association's involvement in the comprehensive transportation plan, the casino's involvement in the sports wagering legislation, and the managed care companies' involvement in privatizing the state's Medicaid system. All these stakeholders had a huge hand in drafting the legislation that impacted their respective fields. **Teachers, being one of the largest employee blocks in the state, would appreciate the same consideration.**

Abolition of the Special Education and Related Services Funding Task Force

KNEA disagrees with the language in HB 2594 that abolishes the SPED Taskforce set forth by KSA 72-3442.

The Special Education and Related Services Funding Taskforce was created by this legislature to:

- *Study and make recommendations for changes in the existing formula for the funding of special education and related services.*

- *Conduct hearings and receive and consider suggestions from teachers, parents, the department of education, the state board of education, other governmental officers and agencies and the general public concerning funding for special education and related services.*
- *Make and submit reports to the legislature on the work of the task force concerning recommendations of the task force. Such reports shall include recommendations for legislative changes and be submitted to the legislature on or before January 14 of each year.*

While it could be argued that all three of the bullets above have been satisfied, the reasonable conclusion is that the work of the taskforce is not finished. One meeting does not do this issue the justice it deserves. This taskforce needs time to do what the legislature has asked of them. Abolishing this taskforce after one meeting seems shortsighted.

The complicated issue of special education funding is one that invokes strong feelings and diverse opinions. This issue is not going away and requires responsible collaboration from all sides. Bringing legislators to the table with experts intending to have ongoing discussions on special education is a great approach. The meeting that took place earlier this month included well thought out arguments from all sides. Unfortunately, politics and the emotions that go with it seem to have derailed the process.

We encourage the committee to strike the language in HB 2594 that abolishes the Special Education and Related Services Funding Task Force, set forth by KSA 72-3442, and refocus its efforts on working with them on this critical issue.

Thank you for your time.