



Garry Sigle Testimony
Kansas Association of American Educators (KANAAE)
House Education Committee
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House Bill 2221

Madam Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Garry Sigle. I am appearing before you today to testify in support of House Bill 2221 as the executive director of the Kansas Association of American Educators (KANAAE). My perspective also includes 33 years experience as a Kansas public school teacher and coach.

The Kansas Association of American Educators is a non-union teacher organization. It is a professional association that provides benefits and services to educators such as legal and liability coverage. Prior to becoming the executive director I was a member of KANAAE for the final 14 years of my teaching/coaching career at Riley County High School, Riley, Kansas. The first 19 years of my career I was a member of the union. I believe I bring a unique perspective to this committee concerning HB2221.

I'll give you three practical reasons to support this legislation. First, I am a firm believer that every educator should have liability insurance beyond what is provided through the school district. KANAAE and the union are both providers of professional educator liability insurance. Agree or disagree with the union, it is a fact that there are many teachers in this state who do not join the union because they disagree with their politics, activities and affiliations. Because of the current law, many educators are not hearing that there are options beyond the union. Because KANAAE does not have access to teacher events like new teacher orientations, district in-services or teacher mailboxes, most teachers in the state do not know that they have an alternative organization that can represent them professionally and provide them with member benefits. Member dues for KANAAE are only \$15 per month, which is one-third the cost of the union. House Bill 2221 would allow educators the opportunity to hear their options, giving teachers access to more information so they can decide for themselves which organization represents who they are and what they believe.

After all, teachers are college-educated professionals who can be trusted to make their own decisions about which associations they wish to join. However, they can only make educated choices when their options are presented to them fairly. HB 2221 empowers individual teachers to make professional decisions about which education employee association best fits their priorities. In my experience, teachers welcome having an option.

In my capacity as executive director of KANAAE, I work to introduce our organization to educators, student teachers, and classified staff. My only options currently appear to be attending curriculum

specific conferences as a vendor or working to pass our information by word of mouth. Yet, we are growing as an organization in Kansas which indicates the desire and need for an alternative to the union. In the past 19 months I have run up against many roadblocks in my desire to allow educators across Kansas to hear of our organization. I'll give you two examples. I had a situation recently where a KANA AE member invited me into her school after the school day to visit with two colleagues who were interested in what we have to offer. Unbelievably, our member was then subjected to intimidation by union leaders in that school and harassed into thinking her job was in jeopardy because she let me into the building. This occurred after the two teachers I visited with requested to drop their union membership. In another school I had an appointment set up to visit with the district staff, until the union found out. The administrator I was working with was forced to cancel my appointment because of the pressure he felt from the union leaders.

This leads me to my second point. HB 2221 solves the problem of administrators being in the middle between teachers and employee associations and allows them to focus on more important issues within their districts. I spoke with a superintendent friend of mine right after I started with KANA AE. I stopped to say hello and request an opportunity to introduce our organization to his teachers. His comment was "why would I want to allow you to speak to my district teachers when I know that would create a conflict with the teachers that I have to negotiate with?" I asked my friend what percentage of his teachers were members of the union. His response was 35-40%. I asked to speak to those not in the union. He said "Garry, I'm sorry. I can't let you speak to my teachers". The last thing I wanted to do was put my friend in a position where his job was more difficult because of my request. The current law created this uncomfortable situation. HB2221 would free administrators from being caught in the middle. Furthermore, I have not been allowed to introduce KANA AE to pre-service teachers in some of the universities in Kansas. One university indicated that they had a union student organization and didn't see the need. My response to the university president was that it wasn't his responsibility to limit the information the students on his campus received. I suggested it was his job to give the students all the information available so they could make the decision that best fit who they are as a person and what they believed. I still have yet to be allowed on that campus to talk with their pre-service teachers.

My third and final point is, as executive director of KANA AE, I can tell you that any organization that insists current law allows for reasonable access hasn't seen it from our viewpoint. It is a cumbersome, unfair process that favors one organization. It is also important to know that similar laws like HB 2221 exist in Florida and Utah where there has been little confusion amongst educators and many educators have exercised their options to join alternative organizations.

As you well know, education is changing and is vastly different from when I entered the profession 35 years ago. It should not be a surprise to this committee that there are new kinds of organizations that seek to serve educators in different ways. I respectfully ask that you support HB 2221 so that teachers have equal access to their professional membership options. Teachers deserve to make well-informed choices.

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