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DATE: February 13, 2018

TO: House Committee on Education

FROM: Katherine Kersenbrock-Ostmeyer  
Director Special Education  
Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center (NKESC)

RE: Opposition to HB 2613

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2613.

A bill such as this has a significant impact on rural areas such as the school districts served by NKESC. Our territory is over 12,000 square miles with 19 rural districts. Currently, we have three private schools located within our region.

Services in private schools such as those noted in the bill will increase cost significantly. Note the examples below:

1) We have three sign language paraeducator/interpreters. They are working in two school districts with three students. The schools are over 95 miles apart and over 60 miles from the home offices of NKESC. None of the three paraeducator/interpreters are fully qualified, however it is the best we can recruit (we provide significant training to assist them in becoming fully qualified)! If a student moves into another member district, we do our best to find another sign language paraeducator/interpreter. However, if we can't find a qualified person we would have to bus the student to a central program. HB2613 would prevent us from busing students to a central program from a private school – but would allow busing from a public school.

2) We have one teacher for vision-impaired services. She serves not only the territory of NKESC, but also assists in the Hi-Plains Cooperative to our south covering an additional 12 counties and the North Central Kansas Interlocal in another county. The large territory is due to teacher shortages. Our teacher provides brailing, teaching and consultation services. If we were mandated to provide private school brailing adding additional curriculum work we would once again have no choice but to add staff (if we can find them).

3) NKESC hosts the Region One Assistive Technology site, utilizes Infinitec, houses a Kansas Equipment Exchange program, and funds our own ATECH program in conjunction with special education service. Our consultants provide consultation and some equipment for checkout to students with IEP's and Section 504 plans. Other costly assistive technology equipment is available to our member district schools through leasing agreements. Local districts are assessed for some services in budgeting in addition to the leasing agreements. Would private schools pay nothing?

With teacher shortages and the predicted funding shortfall in special education of \$133 million in FY2019, I can't see how we can make this happen.

Under federal regulations and laws the provisions of special education funding related to private schools is addressed. In most districts I know special education is provided to private schools in a manner beyond the minimum standards. I know that most of my colleagues and myself are not opposed to school choice but when public funds are used in private schools it reduces the funds available in public programs. Resources are limited and taking money away from public programs and adding it to a few (especially in rural areas such as mine) doesn't work.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to share my concerns.