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Mark Desetti, testimony
House Bill 2150
House K-12 Budget Committee
February 14, 2019

Madame Chair, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on HB 2150. We stand in opposition to this bill.

Kansas NEA has worked diligently to address bullying in our schools over the years. Before there was a bullying statute on the books, KNEA was providing professional development to faculties throughout the state on how to address bullying behaviors in the classroom. Back in 1998, the National Education Association, working with Educational Equity Concepts, Inc, and the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women developed and published three teachers guides on dealing with bullying specific to grade levels.

- Quit It! was designed for grades K-3,
- Bully Proof for grades 4 and 5, and
- Flirting or Hurting for grades 6 through 12.

Each program consisted of age appropriate lessons and activities to use with students to address bullying behaviors and, in the later grades, sexual harassment.

KNEA developed professional development programs for each of these guides and, beginning in 1998, sent training teams to school districts throughout Kansas to work with staff. I was proud to be part of the training cadre and personally led sessions from Lawrence to Syracuse.

When the legislature and State Board of Education got involved in this issue and required school districts to develop their own individual plans to address bullying, demand for the training declined as districts crafted their own training programs congruent with the bullying plans in the districts.

I can't today provide you with evidence of the quality of those programs since they are unique to the districts that wrote them. I think that is something you should be asking about, and continuing concerns indicate that such a review would be helpful.

We have supported bullying bills in past sessions including last year when we stood in strong support of the bill that was heard in the House and passed the House with strong bipartisan support. Unfortunately, that bill did not get a hearing in the Senate.

The bill before you today does not actually address bullying. It essentially ignores bullying and instead seeks to institute a voucher system under which any child or parent who alleges bullying happened is given a large percentage of base aid and encouraged to leave the public school and attend a private school.

Getting a voucher under this bill does not require bullying to have happened and does not require the student getting the voucher to have been bullied. The bill requires the voucher to be offered within 15 days of a report even if the investigation into that report is not finished. There is no requirement that the voucher be tied to an

actual incident. The bill does not require the voucher go to the target of bullying unless the target was the student reporting the incident.

This bill, in fact, marginalizes the target of bullying by absolving all others of any actual responsibility to address the behaviors.

The bill deliberately ignores the district's bullying plan that would address the consequences of bullying and the punishments and remedies in place. Is it the committee's intent that in passing this bill, districts would no longer be required to address bullying? Is it the committee's belief that bullying does not happen in private schools? Is it the committee's belief that private schools will open their doors to any child given one of these vouchers? Would a parochial school that does not support LGBTQ rights be expected to enroll a gay or lesbian student with a voucher?

Let me be clear. There is no direct link between bullying and the provision of a voucher in this bill. This bill has one intent – to give parents the ability to demand a voucher to send their child to a private school.

All I must do to get a voucher is to tell my child to tell a teacher that he/she saw bullying on the playground or in the cafeteria or hall. That's it. Bullying does not have to happen and, if it did, my child does not have to have been the target.

I look forward to standing before this committee to support a bullying bill that helps schools, teachers, and students to address and hopefully end bullying behaviors. This bill doesn't.