

Testimony before the
House Committee for K12 Education Budget
on
HB 2119
by

Charles Steffes, Board Member & Parent of USD 252

Madam Chair and members of the committee;

I stand as an opponent of HB 2119.

Thank you for allowing us to share our perspective on HB 2119. Our School District is located in Southern Lyon County serving approximately 538 number of students. Our rural school district has four buildings in three communities that range from 15% to 75 % free lunch and reduce lunches over recent years. We also have a diverse enrollment in our small rural schools as well so I can say that we are a very well rounded example of a standard Kansas school.

I joined our unified school district board just prior to the 2009 recession. I have had the opportunity to experience the good years as well as the years our district struggled. Like all other districts, we have faced and conquered extreme challenges that have come with the Covid-19 pandemic. In a situation that could have destroyed us, it has brought together our communities to do what is best for our future generations. Our communities are extremely proud of the accomplishments that our students and staff have achieved. Even through these challenging times, the board has pulled together and shifted monetary resources to meet the needs of the students. As with all things in life, there is a price for valuable accomplishments.

HB 2119 is a short and long-term liability to the public-school system. At first, families will see this as a viable option and experiment with public school alternatives. However, most of these families will fail at the expense of the child. Unfortunately, when these experiments fail, these students will revert to the public school systems. This places a burden on the school, teachers and fellow classmates as in most cases the student will be significantly behind their peers. Funding and resources will be better suited enhancing the public school system.

I would like to discuss two personal experiences. The first situation involves our own small business of renting mini storage units. A man called requesting to rent a small storage unit to home school his kids in. Keep in mind these storage units have no electricity, running water, insulation, nor windows. He was requesting the smallest, least expensive unit available because he was on a budget. I believe a storage unit is not an environment suitable to provide a positive learning environment in addition to it not being in the best interest of the children health wise. I refused to rent him a unit. It is my firm belief that situations like this will happen if this bill

passes, as most homes are not equipped to provide an adequate learning experience. Families will see this as a quick interim fix regardless if it is right or wrong.

My second situation involves my oldest son. He struggled with learning at a very young age and thus presented as having attention deficit disorder. My wife and I enrolled him in a private school, thinking the lower teacher to student ratio would provide him with more attention. We were quickly proven otherwise. The private school did not have the resources nor qualified staff to handle his uniqueness. We transferred him to the public school in our community where the staff accurately diagnosed him with severe dyslexia and implemented the appropriate accommodations. We will forever be grateful to the public school system because, although we can help with homework, we were not equipped to teach someone with this type of disability nor did we have the tools to be successful.

As previously stated many private, religious, and home schools do not have the resources to identify and provide accommodations to students with unique needs. Parents do not have the training needed to teach their children either. Granted there are always exceptions to this rule, however I encourage you to remember that whenever a child starts at home and then re-enters the public school system that this is a tremendous burden on their peers, teachers, staff and the school's budget. Ultimately, the child is the one who would lose in these situations and they need to remain the focus of our decisions. The public school system is a proven and reliable resource that when properly funded will give our children the best chance for success.

Respectfully,
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