



Ron Hobert, President
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HB 2143
Written Opponent Testimony
House Education Committee
1 February 2023

Chairman Thomas and members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 2143.

My name is Ron Hobert, and I am the president of the American Federation of Teachers – Kansas. I have also worked for over 30 years as an educator, both in public schools at USD 259 in Wichita and in private schools at the Catholic Diocese of Wichita. I am testifying today as both a representative of the thousands of public employees, parents, and Kansans that AFT-Kansas serves, and as a dedicated and passionate teacher committed to providing our students with the best education possible.

Bullying is an important topic for all Kansas public schools to address and this testimony should not be construed in any way as opposing anti-bullying initiatives or policies. AFT-Kansas supports all public-school educators and all the efforts put forth by local school boards and administrators to address this very important topic. I can say as a teacher in the classroom last year, Wichita Public Schools, and most all Kansas schools, have policies already in place to deal with this sensitive issue.

A clear and simple statement of opposition is that this bill is less about the act of bullying, and perhaps more about mis-guided conclusions regarding a schools' response to acts of bullying. So much of the time, a bullying situation can be very complex; how the situation is resolved is not public knowledge due to confidentiality reasons. Therefore, AFT-Kansas opposes the strongest point in this bill, which is the legislative overreach of this proposal. Along with the fact, this not the legislative help we need at this time as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have found in the [Hopeful Futures Campaign American's Mental Health Report Card](#) (2022) the following statistics:

- the ratio of school psychologists to students in Kansas is 1: 1,157; the recommended ratio is 1:500
- The ratio of school social workers to students is 1:1,360; the recommended ratio is 1:250.
- The ratio of school counselors to students is 1:431; the recommended ratio is 1:250.



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These are the school personnel who should be working side by side with our students and teachers to be the facilitators in resolving these difficult situations in our Kansas public schools. But, as you can see, Kansas is falling short in this area. AFT-Kansas could not be more supportive of any effort to address bullying in our schools, we also very much support working to **reduce and prevent the act of bullying** in our schools.

In conclusion, we believe the Kansas State Board of Education should continue to guide and support recommendations to the local school boards. The local school board must continue to have the authority to make the necessary changes, use current data and updated modifications to policies and procedures which will best address bullying in their districts. A new law, which proposes a blanket legislative solution to the complicated issue of bullying takes the power out of the hands of those who are most familiar with the problem, and places it with people who are far removed from the issues that students and teachers face.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

