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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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LAURA WILLIAMS
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Chairmen Hoheisel, Vice-Chairmen Clifford, Ranking Member Xu, and fellow members of the House Financial Institution and Pensions Committee,

I am here to speak in favor of HB 2659, which I believe is a step forward in trying to recruit and retain teachers in Kansas. Serving on both this committee and the Joint Committee on Pensions, I have been able to have a greater perspective on the issue when it comes to KPERS 3 benefits. Representing Johnson County and two different school districts, it is clear that recruiting and retaining teachers is a challenge when hearing from shareholders within the school districts. We heard testimony during our review of KPERS 3 this past Fall, that while there may be little evidence to if an attractive retirement benefits package existed, retaining and recruiting teachers would improve, it is clear after the KPERS 3 Retirement Plan is not an effective and attractive recruitment plan. It may be seen as effective as that it helps improve the long-term sustainability of the trust fund. To be effective in attracting and keeping teachers in Kansas, we must equip our school district with resources to do so.

Last week, I attended a school in my district, and we discussed the issues with teacher retention and filling vacant seats. They shared with me that they were thankful they did not have vacancies within their science department because only a handful of students graduated last year with Physics teaching degree. We need to consider as a legislature that we may be sitting on a solution to help fill teacher vacancies in Kansas and prevent more from being added. We cannot forget the burdens we placed on our schools, more importantly on teachers, during the pandemic. The next generation of Kansas teachers, our students, had a front row seat of those burdens they had to endure. We will continue to face new barriers to recruitment of teachers, but if we are not exhausting every avenue of solutions to attract new educator workforce, the future of Kansas will suffer.

Thank you Mr. Chair and committee for taking the time to examine the audit of KPERS 3 and to hear HB 2659. My hope is that it begins to start the conversation on real solutions that will impact our educators in Kansas.