

Feb. 2, 2023

**Written Testimony to the Committee on K12 Education Budget**

**Opponent House Bill 2218**

**Justin Coup, Superintendent USD 393 Solomon**

Madam Chair and Committee Members:

I stand in opposition to HB 2218. I am a proud product of public schools, attended a private college, and have served public education for what will be 25 years in May. Besides the apparent separation of church and state, this bill will have intended and unintended consequences on all schools in Kansas.

First, accountability will be an issue for those who receive public dollars in the private sector institution of learning. We have elected local officials who oversee taxpayer dollars and state money to ensure our local schools are financially sound. Not only financially do our local board members hold our public schools accountable, but they also ensure we use our tax dollars wisely to educate ALL children. Regardless of age, gender, race, disability, socioeconomic status, or location, public schools educate all children and accept all in-district students. Local school boards accept out-of-district students as well, which in return provides students/families with school choice. Solomon is considered a rural school district, but we see fluctuations in our enrollment yearly due to the transient culture we live in today. This bill does nothing to hold private schools accountable and allows those schools to exclude or expel those that don't fit "their" model of student.

Secondly, this bill will have a negative impact on the future of rural Kansas. Not because of private schools but because of the cost of adding private schools to the coffers. USD 393 Solomon currently has no private schools in our district and less than 15 students who are homeschooled within the boundaries of our school district. But, if this bill does pass and we begin to fund private schools, districts in counties from Greeley County to Elk County to Dickinson County will feel the impacts financially. The price tag to add private schools to Kansas is not a small amount of money. Historically, we know tough times will return to Kansas. Is this committee ready to make a commitment to fully fund

public and private schools regardless of the price tag? I highly doubt that to be true. A greater burden will be placed on local taxpayers to fill the gap. The burden will now shift to local school boards making decisions they should never have to make based on the county and zip code they serve will determine the success of a district even more in the future than it does today. This bill will place a tremendous burden on those local elected officials and their taxpayers.

Finally, this bill ignores the way all communities feel about their schools. In Dickinson County alone, the majority feel the Gorillas, Cowboys, Irish, Rainers, or Lions are a sense of community pride. Our local school boards, teachers, staff, community members, and patrons love our local schools. Have you visited these communities? How about in Greeley County? Elk County? Scott County? Crawford County? Nemaha County? Marion County? The public schools in 200 counties across the state love, take pride in and highly value their local schools. Local taxpayer dollars need to stay with the public schools. We do not fund private gyms with taxpayer dollars, but you are asking to fund private schools with taxpayer dollars! So why would public schools be any different?

Kansans are proud of their local public schools. We help all our children along their educational journey at USD 393 Solomon. That journey looks different for each child here at Solomon as it does across the State of Kansas. Success happens at Solomon because of the amazing staff and the outstanding community support we receive. An unintended consequence of this bill will be the added financial burden and lack of opportunities rural Kansas will face. I am proud to be a Kansan, proud to lead a fantastic staff, and proud to raise my four children in a public school.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin D. Coup". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Justin D. Coup, Superintendent  
USD 393 Solomon