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Director of Government Relations & Legislative Affairs
Oral Testimony – Opponent
House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
House Bill 2521
February 8, 2024

Chairperson Williams, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 2521.

KNEA has several resolutions that speak to professional excellence in education. We are committed to providing the best educational environment for students by having highly qualified educators in the classrooms. We are dedicated to ensuring all educators have completed an accredited education preparation program that is approved by the State Board of Education. This practice is part of the foundation of our vision to create a great public school for every student.

Professional licensure/certification requirements are designed to prepare educators to meet the needs of all students. It sends a message to the families and the communities that rely on a strong public education system that they can trust students are receiving the education that they deserve. As a professional organization and union of educators, we take a great deal of interest in the licensing/certification processes of our field. We, like the multitudes of all of the other professional organizations, take a fierce approach to ensuring that the professional standards of our field is held to a high level.

Alternative Licensure in Kansas

KNEA recognizes the need to find innovative approaches that will encourage new individuals to join the teaching profession. This is why KNEA supports alternative licensure for individuals to join the teaching profession through non-traditional paths.

KNEA supports alternative licensure with the following adopted resolution. It states:

KNEA believes that alternative routes to licensure/certification should be available for persons already holding baccalaureate degrees in other fields. To receive a license/certificate, an alternative-route candidate must achieve the same state standards in basic skills, subject matter knowledge, and pedagogy, through CAEP accredited institutions, as those required of traditional candidates.

Despite our support of Alternative paths to teacher licensure/certification, KNEA believes that HB 2521 falls short of our standards in the following ways:

- **The question of pedagogy** – HB 2521 specifically states that no applicant should be required to complete professional education pedagogy coursework in an accredited college or university engaged in teacher preparation as a prerequisite to a obtaining a teaching license.

The study of pedagogy, its understanding, and its practice is widely considered critical to teachers in the classroom. Pedagogy can be described as the “link” between the teacher and student. Any bill that appears to water down the importance of pedagogy in the training and licensing/certification of teachers is highly concerning to KNEA.

- **The question of CAEP accredited institutions** – HB 2521 does require an alternative teacher certification program to contain pedagogical training. It also calls for applicants to pass a pedagogy examination to successfully complete the program. However, it does not require this to be done within the framework of institutions accredited by CAEP (Council of Accreditation of Educator Preparation).

Much like many other professional organizations, KNEA strongly believes in the importance of consistent standards and regulatory frameworks within their profession. Opening the door to licensure outside of these constructs could lead to a weakened set of standards and to teachers in the classroom that are not fully prepared.

- **The Question of Mentoring** – HB 2521 allows the KSDE to require applicants to participate in a school district based mentoring program for one year. KNEA supports current regulation that calls for a minimum of two years of support with a trained mentor.

In addition to the concerns raised above, KNEA is also concerned that HB 2521 directs the Kansas Department of Education to do things in a way that undermines its self-executing powers.

In closing, educators make up one of the largest workforces in the state. We’re your neighbors, your siblings, your parents, your friends. We serve the children in your communities. As stated above, the issue of licensure/certification is one of the most important issues for any profession. We would have appreciated the opportunity to make suggestions on the bill before it was drafted. If nothing else, even a heads up that once again, decisions that have an impact on our profession are going to be made without our involvement would have been better than finding out about this bill by reading the legislative calendar.

Thank you for your time.