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Neutral Testimony on HB 2236

House Education Committee, Rep. Adam Thomas, chair

February 8, 2023

Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Stogsdill, Members of the Committee:

My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber; I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that educates, engages and advocates on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding various critical racial, economic and climate justice issues. We are an advocacy partner of several of the mainline denominations in Kansas, including the local ELCA Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Episcopal, and Unitarian judicatories.

KIFA has been alarmed by a recent spate of laws in red states outlawing or restricting the teaching of certain subjects, particularly the history and culture of historically marginalized communities, especially the African American community and the LGBT community. Last year, this concern led us to help coordinate and a coalition of education and justice advocates, community leaders, and clergy called the "Teach the Truth" coalition. Fortunately, we were able to help sustain the governor's veto on SB58.

Our opposition to that bill was based on our conviction that what was being asked for was not the ability of an individual parent to direct the education of their child – which we already believe is in Kansas policy and law – but rather the ability of any parent, or indeed any community member, to restrict the ability of *other people's children* to access important educational and cultural material based on the religious – or more likely, political – beliefs of said complainant. This has led to terrible outcomes in throughout the country, where important cultural, historical, and literary works have literally been pulled off library shelves because of the complaints of a single person or group.

My reading of the current bill indicates that it limits the ability to object to an individual student and parent; that is, it does not allow another parent to limit my child's learning. As I've stated, I believe this is already countenanced by Kansas policy and law, hence my neutral testimony.

I also appreciate the fact that the current bill has no mention of "critical pedagogy" or the like, which was a major basis of our opposition to last year's bill.

Two further things of note: First, I believe that this bill is unnecessary, because as I say, parents are already allowed to pull their children from activities they find objectionable. And second: my lack of opposition to the bill is dependent on it being a standalone bill, and that it passes as currently written, without provision for books or curricular materials to be removed for all based on the complaint of one, and without mention of so-called "critical pedagogy." If the bill is substantially changed later in the process, or bundled with another bill, Kansas Interfaith Action would of course be likely to revise our neutral stance.

Thank you.