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Director of Government Relations & Legislative Affairs  
Oral Testimony – Opponent  
House Education Committee  
House Bill 2732  
February 19, 2024

Chairperson Thomas and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony opposing HB 2732.

KNEA has been a vocal supporter of the health, safety, and welfare of students. We have a strong belief that a healthy school environment positively affects the social/emotional, cognitive, and physical health of children.

Our members have debated and adopted several resolutions that focus on health, safety, and welfare of students. Many of these resolutions encompass mental health components. They include integration of comprehensive school counseling programs that are provided by licensed school counselors, integrated school social work services that are provided by social workers that are trained in crises intervention, individual and group therapy, and behavior management. They also include support of special diagnostic services designed for early detection of mental health issues. Our resolutions also strongly support access to school and community health facilities to meet the needs of students, student families, and the communities where they reside.

HB 2732 would allow a local board of education to employ a chaplain to provide support, services, and programs for students. KNEA strongly believes that this is the job for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. The concern of HB 2732 is increased by the language in the bill that exempts said chaplains from any requirement to be licensed. Given the fact that mental health challenges are becoming more common in schools, KNEA believes that hiring unlicensed individuals to provide the services that professionals should be doing is problematic.

KNEA has concerns about the issue of school district employment and mandatory reporting. Currently, as members of clergy, chaplains are not required to be mandatory reporters. Should a chaplain be “employed” by a school district, would they be required to be mandatory reporters or remain exempt? The same question applies should a chaplain be accepted as a volunteer of a school district.

In closing, KNEA is also concerned that HB 2732 blurs the lines between the separation of church and state. Our opposition to HB 2732 should not be construed as a statement that faith and religion shouldn’t play an important part in the lives of Kansans. However, we believe that the appropriate avenue for such thought is the church and not the public school.