

Testimony to the Committee on K-12 Education Budget

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BILL NUMBER: HB 2738, Revising the special education state aid statewide costs calculation

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written-only testimony

Date of Hearing: Tuesday, February 13, 2024, 3:30 PM Room 546-S

Dear Chair & members of the committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill HB 2738.

HB2738 Promotes a false narrative that the legislature is fully funding special education.

The number of students in need of special education funds has increased, as students who have had partial in-class time during the pandemic have missed out on essential learning time. Many students at Woodlawn Elementary are in need of partial funds for special education, be it for special needs, attention troubles as they have not learned how to be in a classroom (having spent formative time in virtual classrooms), are suffering from lack of funded food programs, or other occupational therapy student needs. While there is also an increased number of students transferring to our school, as schools in our district have had to close (because of lack of state funding for special education), and the students with the most special needs have come to our school, as our teachers and staff understand the need for SPED.

Currently, only the most severe of students receiving the help they need at school, thus pulling paraprofessionals and SPED teachers to be spending on-on-one time with severe students, while their intent as SPED teachers and paras is to assist teachers in helping their whole classrooms succeed and get the teaching and development they need. As teachers are left to fend for themselves with increasing special education needs with no para educators or SPED teachers to assist or give them breaks, our district is facing burnout from teachers, especially since we cannot pay them a livable wage.

The cost to USD497 is \$8 Million

Some of our teachers have two or more jobs, cutting lawns, for example, just to make ends meet. We need to make sure teachers are well cared for and paid a livable wage; we need to make sure students are getting the specialized instruction they need; and thirdly, we need to make sure that

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these things are funded. The cost of this bill, saying that the special education funds should continue to be taken from general funds, could cost our district alone \$8 million dollars, since we are owed \$8.4 million dollars from SPED funding that is not being fully funded at the moment.

There has been no thoughtful study of the formula

Recalculating the costs, as the HB 2738 bill suggests, would ask them to “multiply” and “divide” counts of “full time” students that may change. The bill is extremely confusing to read, likely causing principals to do more work to try to get the money they rightly deserve to keep their schools afloat.

In closing, I ask you to vote NO on bill HB 2738.

Molly Starr
Parent with USD 497 school district
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