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UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 115

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TAVIS DESORMIERS, SUPERINTENDENT

House K-12 Education Budget Committee
Tavis Desormiers - tdesormiers@usd115.org
Testimony in Support of SB 387

March 4, 2024

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the House K-12 Education Budget Committee:

My name is Tavis Desormiers and I have been the Superintendent for USD 115 since 2022. I have been an educator and worked in the public school system for 27 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 387. For the following reasons, passage of SB 387 is of extreme importance to USD 115.

Despite being a rural community school district, we have experienced tremendous growth in our enrollment in the last several years. A large part of this growth has resulted from the closure of small rural schools in our region. Currently, USD 115 educates 97 students that are considered “nonresident”, or out of district, students. This is not a new phenomenon; for the last 10 years we have consistently enrolled more than 80 such students annually. Largely due to this growth, USD 115 is currently operating at full capacity.

We realized the predicament we might be in with open enrollment and our capacity so we reached out to the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) for guidance. **KASB attorneys advised us that under the current language in K.S.A. 72-3123 we would have to enter all of our out-of-district students into a lottery process**, just like any other out-of-district student who may choose to apply for attendance under open enrollment.

If that were to be the case, high school juniors and twin siblings Lane and Maddie, who have been attending USD 115 since Kindergarten, would have to enter the lottery system to see if they are chosen to attend our district next year. If not chosen in the lottery, being forced to finish their senior year in another school would be devastating for them and we don't believe uprooting established students was the intent of open enrollment legislation. Thus, we strongly support SB 387, which simply clarifies that out-of-district students, like Lane and Maddie, would not be required to enter the lottery. We have no objections to the amendments adopted by the Senate Committee on Education. In closing, I also want to speak briefly to our growth and the impact it has had on our district. As small rural schools in our region have shuttered their doors, our student population has grown - particularly with out-of-district students. Because we are at capacity and still growing, our patrons passed a bond to add additional classroom space

at our grade school and high school. That bond was necessary, in part, because our district is not receiving the property tax dollars of these out-of-district areas in our Local Option Budget. These are areas where students used to attend one district but after the closure of their school, came to USD 115. Unfortunately, the land mass in those areas is still retained by the closing district who continues to benefit from the tax dollars in their LOB. Many of those landowners want their property and their tax dollars to flow to USD 115, something not allowed under current law. I understand that fight is for another day but I thought it worth mentioning as an underlying cause of our student population growth.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.