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KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Timothy R. Graham  
Director of Government Relations & Legislative Affairs  
Oral Testimony (WebEx)– Opponent  
House Committee on Education  
Senate Bill 87  
March 10, 2025

Chairperson Estes, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 87.

Kansas NEA is a member-driven organization that represents all 40,000 educators in the state of Kansas. We have nearly 22,000 members. The positions we advocate for have been proposed, debated, and adopted by several hundred members that were selected by their peers to attend our annual Representative Assembly.

Our members have a strong stance on vouchers that is quite clear. The first part of that resolution reads:

*Kansas NEA believes that state-mandated choice/voucher plans, tuition tax credits, or funding formulas that have the effect of financing private education with public funds, undermine support for public schools. Such programs could lead to racial, economic, and social isolation of students and weaken or destroy the public school system.*

*KNEA acknowledges that it is the right of parents/guardians to choose to send their students to private schools.*

*KNEA further believes that state funds should not be allocated to pay for feasibility studies of such choice, voucher, or tax-credit programs.*

*KNEA further believes that any private school or agency that receives public funding through voucher plans, tax credits, or other funding/financial arrangements must be subject to all accountability measures and regulations required of public schools.*

As stated in our resolution above, Kansas NEA fully recognizes and supports a family's right to choose private schooling for their children. However, this should not come at the expense of Kansas taxpayers.

Kansas NEA opposes SB 87 for the following reasons.

**Public funds should be reserved for public interests.** It is in Kansas's best interest to educate all students, including those with disabilities, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and students

from diverse racial, cultural, and spiritual backgrounds. Private schools are not required to accept or accommodate all students. Until private schools in Kansas are required to educate all Kansas children, they should not receive taxpayer money or state-sanctioned incentives.

**Diverting funds away from public schools will undermine them.** It is in Kansas's best interest to maintain a well-funded and fully supported public education system. Every voucher proposal that depletes state general fund revenue—like the one in this bill—or directly allocates state general fund revenues to private schools, as seen in other proposals, will make it increasingly difficult to fund schools at Gannon levels each year.

Proponents have even suggested that this bill will save taxpayers money, claiming that private schools educate students at a lower cost than the state does. However, this argument doesn't hold up. Just because funding follows the student to a private school doesn't mean that the expenses associated with employing personnel, maintaining buildings, and sustaining programs—among other costs—simply disappear.

**Voucher programs lack accountability and oversight, with no guarantee of better outcomes.** Public schools must adhere to strict regulations, including standardized testing, curriculum guidelines, and non-discrimination policies. In contrast, private schools often lack the same level of transparency and accountability, making it difficult to ensure public funds are used appropriately. Additionally, little consistent evidence suggests that private schools, on average, provide a better education than public schools when socioeconomic factors are considered. Public funds would be better spent improving public schools rather than subsidizing private alternatives.

SB 87 fails to ensure that private schools receiving public funds are held to the same standards as public schools. In fact, SB 87 does not include any provisions regarding accountability, measurement, licensure, accreditation, assessment, or service requirements. This omission is yet another reason why KNEA opposes the bill.

**Voucher programs could increase educational inequality by creating a multi-tiered public school system.** Private schools can select students based on entrance exams, tuition costs, or other criteria. Public funds directed to private schools may disproportionately benefit wealthier families while leaving lower-income students in struggling public schools with fewer resources. This dynamic can deepen divisions between socioeconomic groups, resulting in an unequal, fragmented education system rather than improving education for all.

**Voucher programs have faced challenges in many states.** While supporters argue that vouchers provide school choice, several states have seen these programs fail due to poor student outcomes (Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio), lack of oversight (Florida, Wisconsin), financial mismanagement (Arizona), and legal obstacles (Colorado, Tennessee). These issues have led to modifications, restrictions, or outright repeals of voucher programs in various states.

**In closing, the most painful part for teachers when talking about such bills is the rhetoric seems to follow them. These proposals always appear to be built upon the assumption that public schools and, in turn, public school teachers are not thriving to meet the needs of Kansas children. This is not the case.**

We ask the committee to oppose SB 87.