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Oral Testimony – Opponent

Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 255
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Chair Baumgardner, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to SB 255.

KNEA recognizes that at face value this seems to be an obvious and simple issue with an obvious and simple fix. Unfortunately, it is not.

As part of our testimony, we submit a statement from a former teacher that has direct knowledge of the ins and outs surrounding the planning and implementation of extracurricular activities designed to promote learning outside of the classroom.

Educators work very hard to meet the individual needs of every student. As students develop and grow, so do opportunities for learning outside of the school grounds and campus. Routinely, educators plan for activities that require overnight accommodations for students. Existing district and board policies govern the manner by which these activities are undertaken. Further, the educators responsible for planning take into account several factors including alignment whenever possible with parent and student preferences and individual needs, logistical requirements and certainly budget limitations. However, balancing individual needs and preferences within a group setting offers many challenges.

Under existing policy and procedure, the school district collaborates with parents to make suitable arrangements for the students participating in the overnight outing. This bill could have the effect of eliminating those rights afforded to parents by tying the hands of the district.

Locally established policies that work to include every kind of student with every kind of need to provide safe learning activities is best for students. This bill fails to recognize the totality of the circumstance it seeks to address and in doing so will likely create greater problems for educators, parents, and students.

Furthermore, adding a definition “biological sex” appears shift the focus away from the myriad circumstances that come into play when planning these activities. This could have the effect of punishing school districts, shaming educators, and putting students in even more uncomfortable situations than the one this bill seeks to

address. Additionally, it ignores a stark reality that imprudent student choices and inappropriate behavior between students can, will and has occurred without regard to student gender.

If you agree with this teacher or not, KNEA asserts that their statement points out one bright fact. Teachers and educators should be at the table when the legislature drafts and debates laws impacting their profession, their students and their families.

A system that is comprised of hundreds of thousands of individuals that include students, parents, teachers, and educators of all sorts will see challenges. Extremely tough decisions will have to be made. Some of those decisions will be unpopular. Some of those decisions will be mistakes OR appear to be mistakes on the surface. However, a handful of anecdotal circumstances are not an indication that the whole system needs to be upended with action from the legislature. Legislation by anecdote is often a recipe for unintended consequences.

We respectfully ask you to not pass SB 255 and explore other angles to address these rare circumstances.