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HB 2506 Authorizing students enrolled in virtual schools to participate in activities in a resident district

Proponent

Hearing - Wednesday, January 24, 2024, 3:30 PM Room 546-S

Monday, January 22, 2024

To the Committee Members for the hearing on HB 2506

I am writing in strong support of HB 2506, which will allow students to participate in activities in their local school district if they are an enrolled student at a virtual school. This bill will not only provide needed and desired activities for virtual school students in Kansas, but will strengthen Kansas as a national leader in quality virtual school programs. This is essential if Kansas is to remain a strong leader in innovative and flexible education.

I have been a parent of students in Kansas virtual schools for 17 years, beginning in 2007 with Lawrence Virtual School and transitioning in 2011 to be an original family with Maize Virtual Preparatory School. I have had four of my children enrolled consistently in virtual schools throughout these 17 years and plan to continue for at least two more years. Throughout this time, we have resided in Lawrence, KS and been residents of the USD497 school district. The flexibility of the virtual school options in Kansas have been not only an asset to our family, but a strong reason to keep us as residents of the state for the past 21 years, despite several opportunities to move away.

In my own professional work, I have regular encounters with families around the country who school their children at home. I can state unequivocally that Kansas is and has been for years a leader in virtual education options. I often speak to parents in other states who are envious of the diverse and excellent offerings in the State of Kansas for families who desire to offer a quality education from home. My family has benefited greatly from virtual schools, and we feel confident about the excellent education provided to our sons. One son is a recent Phi Beta Kappa and *summa cum laude* graduate of Arizona State University who has moved back home to work at the University of Kansas. Another will graduate top of his class at Lawrence High School this May. Two more continue as students at Maize Virtual Preparatory School.

However, one enormous challenge for our family has involved the restrictions placed on extracurricular activities via public schools for students who are enrolled in virtual schools. While being virtual students with the USD266 district, my own sons have frequently asked to participate in activities such as debate, forensics, soccer, and tennis. Unfortunately, the current restrictions requiring enrollment in the local district and thereby dividing fund allocation to the two districts make this impossible. If my students are primarily enrolled in the stellar (and highly sought) academic offerings at Maize Virtual Preparatory School, they must enroll in one course

in our local district to participate in any activities. If they do this, their primary school loses at least half of its funding for us. This renders this option impossible. The result is unsustainable for the virtual school and significantly penalizes the viability of virtual schools in Kansas.

HB 2506 will allow families to continue to enjoy the benefits of choosing a leading virtual school while also gaining opportunities to interact in activities and sports with their local community. This flexibility would have been of great benefit to my two older sons. My younger two would love this option in future years. The addition of publicly available athletics and activities would provide the missing link in their public school education.

If Kansas is to remain a national leader in innovative schooling options and stellar virtual education, it must pass HB 2506 to open doors for local activities for virtual students.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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