

**Testimony before the  
House Committee on Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development  
On Sub for HB 2027 – Contract negotiations for certain professional employees  
By Tony White, Director  
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2027.

The bill would drastically impact the ability of teachers to have a say in many aspects of their professional life. It reduces the size of the bargaining unit, restricts the topics which teachers may discuss with their Boards, and creates impossible and confusing rules for any Board and teachers' Association trying to bargain in good faith.

I taught middle school in Halstead and Rose Hill for 15 years and have been a KNEA Director in Southeast Kansas for the last 18 years. My locals include school districts, special education interlocals, community colleges, and a 4-year Regents university. I have negotiated about 200 contracts over that time, and bargain in 10-12 different school districts a year. There might be a few people in Kansas with more experience in public sector bargaining, but not many.

Our current bargaining law is not perfect, but Sub for HB 2027 is a giant step in the wrong direction. The proponents have touted flexibility as a benefit. It's not about flexibility; unless by flexibility one means that the Boards can do about whatever they want. It's really a radical shift in the careful balance that has developed between teachers and their Boards over the last 40 years. What we have now provides a structured system for teachers to come together with their employers and discuss their terms and conditions of work. A relationship forms over time, and with positive leadership from both sides, it becomes a process that provides crucial leadership and synergy to the district and enhances the quality and efficiency of our schools. Sure, it's about pay and benefits, but it's also about what is required to meet their students' needs. It's a place to address unreasonable work load, unproductive procedures, inadequate supplies or discipline, or flagging morale. It's the relief valve in the pressure cooker that working in public schools has become. Bargaining is really problem-solving, and done properly, the teachers and the Board discover many shared interests and come to understand their partner when the interests compete.

Boards and Superintendents, at least the enlightened ones, use bargaining to establish and support a culture where employees are highly valued and decisions are collaboratively developed. Employees respond to that type of management and engage more deeply in their work. It reflects the ownership teachers have in what they do. In fact, teaching isn't what my members do. It's who they are.

Each year at bargaining, districts and teachers work through these essential issues and almost always have a bilateral agreement. A small percentage of bargains statewide each year go to impasse and a miniscule amount end with a unilateral when that fails. The Kansas system works.

If you pass Sub for HB 2027, exceptional employers might continue to be collaborative with their teachers. They will be the rare exception. This statute, like most in the books, is about the bottom end of the bell curve. Many bosses are not stellar. They are insecure or ineffective or afraid of the Board president. We need laws to guarantee the teachers in those districts the rights that in a better world might not be necessary.

Here's proof: When KSSA and KASB showed up to help write this bill with their wish list of teachers' rights they want reduced, that outlined the very path many districts will actually take: stripping the contracts of our teachers midyear and refusing to bargain items essential to our professional well-being. Why would KSSA and KASB ask for something this outrageous unless they have leaders and locals ready to do just that? In fact, KSSA claims that their punitive recommendations are based on a member survey. If that is true, then it is clear we need the protections our current Professional Negotiations Act provides. According to KSSA, the majority of school superintendents favor rewarding their hard-working and loyal employees by stripping them of rights they enjoyed for over 40 years.

Please reject Sub for HB 2027. Thank you for your consideration. I would be glad to answer any questions.