

Opposition Testimony to Homeschool Participation

House Bill 2030

January 24, 2020

My name is Jamie Finkeldei. I am the Associate Superintendent of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita and the President of the Kansas Association of Independent and Religious Schools (KAIRS). The Diocese of Wichita is the 10th largest school district in the state of Kansas with over 9,000 students in 34 elementary and four high schools. The Kansas Association of Independent and Religious Schools, or KAIRS, consists of 140 Christian, Catholic, Independent, Lutheran, and Seventh-day Adventist schools representing more than 35,000 students in the state of Kansas. We are primarily an advocacy group working with KSDE and the state legislature to ensure equitable treatment for private schools in the state of Kansas. While not all private schools in Kansas are members of KSHSAA, the executive board felt it necessary to speak out against this proposal. Last week KAIRS was in Topeka testifying opposite of KSHSAA, but this week we stand shoulder to shoulder with KSHSAA in opposition to this bill.

On the surface, allowing Homeschool students to participate in high school activities seems to be a fair proposal. However, the unintended consequences of this bill would be devastating for private and public schools alike. At many of our private schools, competition for even making a team is fierce. We regularly have to cut players from volleyball, boys and girls basketball and soccer. The angst and conflict these cuts inflict on our students and parents is difficult enough. But imagine if your child, who had been in the district for their entire life, didn't make the team but a homeschool student did. That would be very hard for a school to navigate.

Secondly, I think we all know parents will do anything for their children. And we also know that, unfortunately, sports dominate our society. I can guarantee you that parents will use this rule to skirt around KSHSAA and school policies meant to put education first and protect children. Our schools have a policy that if a student is failing two or more classes they are ineligible for a week and then put on a week-to-week contract, which allows them to compete if they keep their grades up, but ineligible if their grades slip. There is no doubt in my mind that there are parents who when faced with that scenario, will pull their kids from school to "homeschool" them and they will no longer be failing any classes, therefore they will be eligible. A second example is that we have an attendance policy that says if you are not in school by noon on a given day you cannot practice that day and if you miss Friday you cannot compete on Saturday. IF it ever comes to a point of regional or state competition and the threat of not being able to compete, a parent will immediately pull their student, claim they are homeschooling them, and state that their child was at homeschool all day so they are now eligible to compete. And one last example, we have a policy in place that says our school athletic trainer must clear an athlete to compete after an injury or concussion. We have had many parents over the years fight this policy and try to give us notes from their family doctor saying the student is fine because they so desperately want to let their child compete. Again, I will guarantee you the next time this situation arises the parent will pull their child, "homeschool" them, and say their "school" doctor has given them the all clear to participate.

Finally, there are homeschool association teams in cross-country, soccer, volleyball, track and basketball. Our private schools regularly compete against them. Therefore, there is already an opportunity for Homeschool students to participate in organized sports if they want. We do not need to create additional opportunities with this many unintended consequences.

This bill might be ok for the well-intentioned, dedicated homeschool families. But those families usually do not want their children participating with the schools anyway. This bill is much more likely to be coopted by parents who are willing to exploit any rule for their students benefit, even at the expense of their education and/or safety. Finally, it undermines the schools ability to enforce its rules and have control over what goes on in their building. For all these reasons, KAIRS is opposed to this legislation.

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