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Testimony in opposition to HB 2085  
Before the Kansas House Standing Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development  
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The language in HB 2085 makes bargaining permissive (p.8, line 13) but at the same time grants individual employees or groups of employees' status as a representative for negotiating purposes should a district choose to bargain (p. 4, lines 34-35 and p. 5, lines 3-30).

These provisions, as you certainly see, would make it impossible for school boards to elect to bargain. They could never risk exposure to the tremendous increase in workload that would be incurred if even a small percentage of employees chose to bargain on their own.

My purpose today is to explain how the bargaining process has been beneficial for my district and how taking that process away will negatively impact a great number of Kansas' students.

My name is Amy Martin. I am President of the Board of Education for Olathe USD233. We are the second largest district in the state with almost 29,000 students. We are a diverse district and our diversity grows every year.

We have our challenges.

Approximately 15% of our students receive special education services, 27% are on free or reduced lunch, and 300 students are homeless. We have 1800 English language learners who speak 63 different languages at home. We have ten Title 1 schools where the percentage of children on free and reduced lunch ranges from 40% to over 80%, and populations tend to be quite transient.

Despite our challenges, what we are doing works.

We have made AYP in reading for the past six years in a row and in math for the past seven. All of our schools are fully accredited and we have no schools on improvement. Our ACT scores are well above the state average, we have 17 National Blue Ribbon schools, and we are the proud home to seven Kansas Teachers of the Year and this year's Superintendent of the Year. We've received a 99 percent efficiency rating from Standard & Poor's and our community has been listed among "America's Top 25 Places to Live and Go to School."

What we are doing works.

It works despite the economic upheaval of the past few years, despite the tough choices we've had to make about programs, compensation, benefits, and reserve levels. It works despite the fact we've packed more kids into our classrooms, reduced support staff, and reduced professional development. We've given our teachers more responsibility and higher expectations, with almost nothing in the way of increased compensation, yet somehow it works.

It works because of the trusting, collaborative relationship our board, our administrators, and our staff have established, valued, and maintained. It works because we are a team.

Olathe has long practiced interest-based bargaining with our teachers association. This process involves a form of year-round negotiations that, at times, can look burdensome, but ultimately and consistently produces excellent outcomes. Bargaining, as practiced in Olathe, contributes to an environment where everyone at the table shares the same goals and has an important voice in the discussion. It leads to conversations where diverse and competing viewpoints are forced to stand or fall on their own merit. The process demands that everyone at the table bring forward their best offers and ideas and act as part of a team.

The team mindset we have cultivated has led to our success and buoyed us through the difficulties of the past few years. I don't want to give the impression it is always sunshine and roses on our team, but it is this team mindset that will carry us through the challenges of the future.

HB 2085 as presented would drastically alter the makeup of our team. The ability to make unfettered decisions, as this bill would allow, would certainly make the work of our school board more expedient, but it won't make our work better. It won't make our schools better.

I urge you to consider my comments, and on behalf of the 29,000 students we serve, continue to give the Olathe School Board the local control we need to run our schools the way we best see fit for our community. Allow us to continue to build on the model that has brought us so much success.

(One note: These proceedings came up quickly and did not give our board an opportunity to adopt an official position on this bill. These comments are my own but they reflect the sentiment of the board.)

Thank you for your time and consideration this afternoon.