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Testimony to Joint Meeting of Appropriations and Ways & Means Committees

Chairs, Senator, Ty Masterson and Representative, Ron Ryckman

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Public Comment, June 23, 2016, 11:00 am, Old Supreme Court Room, 346-S

Testimony Kansas Parent-Teacher Association

Potential School Funding Changes in Response to the May 27, 2016, Gannon Opinion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comment. I am speaking here today on behalf of the Kansas PTA. The PTA is a non-partisan, volunteer, parent-teacher organization established in 1897, working to improve the lives of every child through community service and public policy advocacy.

Kansas PTA is encouraged by the recent discussions among our state's superintendents to help craft a viable response to the May 27 *Gannon* ruling, as well as by the legislative interest in educators' collective perspectives and recommendations for this special session. Kansas PTA urges committee members, and the state legislators at large, to work closely with our public education stakeholders throughout this process of finding a swift and fair resolution to the inequitable state finance of public education.

Existing inequities have been compounded by the substantive reduction in state revenues, following the 2012 tax policy to eliminate income tax. The increased pressure on the State General Fund has restricted the availability of state aid for the operational functions of public education and has shifted a larger portion of the financial responsibility onto local communities. Kansas PTA is hopeful that a longer-term solution to the adequacy portion of the *Gannon* lawsuit will alleviate many of the factors contributing to the repetitive equity pitfalls.

Recognizing that the task of this special session is contextually and historically charged, Kansas PTA strongly encourages that this short-term equity fix be addressed, without pitting school communities against one another and without changes to education policy as a means of securing votes. The stakes are high and Kansas students have been waiting for far too long.

Moving forward from this special session, Kansas PTA will continue to advocate for an investment in public education, at a level which provides school districts with the funds needed

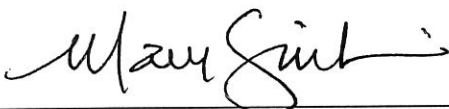
Senate Ways and Means Committee
Date: 06/23/2016
Attachment #: 9

to cover the actual costs of providing each child with the opportunity to achieve the state education standards. PTA will continue to call for the establishment of a transparent and meaningful process to draft a new school finance formula that will meet the test of time. We expect this process to involve all key education stakeholders, to propose a working definition of the term suitable, and to identify a process for estimating the dynamic costs and evolving efficiencies of providing all youth the opportunity to achieve the state education standards.

In alignment with our legislative platform and priorities 1 and 2 (also noted below), Kansas PTA supports a school finance formula that provides both equitable and adequate opportunity for all youth and school communities to achieve regardless of their readiness, disability, language, wealth or zip code. We ask that you consider our testimony as you deliberate a resolution to the *Gannon* equity ruling:

- PTA mission and purpose have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago, focused on facilitating every child's potential and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.
- Legislative Priority 1. Kansas PTA will support efforts to strengthen and improve the Kansas public school finance system, which includes legislation and policies that:
A. Uphold Kansas Constitutional obligations to make suitable provision for the finance of the Kansas public schools that is equitable for every child; B. Pursue solutions to fully fund state and federal educational mandates, without disproportionately shifting the burden to local communities.
- Legislative Priority 2. Kansas PTA will support efforts to restore an equitable and balanced tax policy to maintain a reliable revenue stream for public education. A policy which draws upon income, property and sales taxes has been proven by history to be a secure and sustainable approach. Kansas PTA opposes provisions limiting the growth of government before public education is fully funded to statutory levels.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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Cc: Josh Halperin, VP of Advocacy
Devin Wilson, State Legislative Chair
Denise Sultz, Kansas PTA President

THE PTA POSITION

Kansas PTA is a nonpartisan association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities.