

To: Education Committee
From: Mary Ann Woirhaye
Neutral Conferee on HB2697

Hello Mr. Chairman and Representatives of the K-12 Education Budget

Committee, my name is Mary Ann Woirhaye. As we look at the important issue of school transportation funding, I think it is pertinent to consider what bus transportation looks like in certain Kansas communities. I'm here today to share my story and that of my neighbors.

I am the proud mother of 2 children, ages 8 and 10. My husband and I make our home in the south end of Johnson County where suburbs give way to rural farmlands. Our close-knit community is small - neighbors know neighbors, kids run between houses and knock on back doors to play. In the Fall of 2017, our school district opened the doors to a brand-new elementary school. Our neighborhood of 100 houses was slated to attend the new school. While we lived more than 2.5 miles from our old school and received bus service, we were surprised to learn that we would now have to provide our own transportation or pay an additional \$600 for bussing to our new school. You see, our house is located 2.25 miles from the new school, just under the state minimum of 2.5 miles. To complicate matters further, the new school was built along a fast, heavily traveled, 2 lane road. Less than a mile from US Highway 69, the school is

situated along a major thoroughfare used by large trucks to access the highway.

There are deep ditches, no sidewalks and no crosswalks. *Simply stated, my children do not have a safe way to self-commute to school.*

A recent audit of State transportation dollars revealed that the school district actually received funding for the school bus that services our area. In fact, the district was overpaid because of the density curve. The bus was already commissioned to pick up riders living further than 2.5 miles. It operates at half-capacity and passes my doorstep daily. Yet, in order to use it, I was asked to personally incur an expense of nearly \$600 to bus my 2 children to school. I take issue with this for a number of reasons. First, it doesn't pass the common-sense test: if the bus has been commissioned, there is space, and my children are on the route, it just makes sense to pick them up. Second, there isn't a consideration for safety. Kids should not be expected to traverse two-lane roads with no sidewalks, crosswalks, and deep ditches in order to get to school. They shouldn't have to walk over rail-road tracks and narrow bridges, regardless if they live 1 mile or 3 miles from school. Safe transportation should be provided for children who live in these environments. I would support an amendment that provides transportation for children living within the 2.5 mile boundary but who do not have a safe path to school.

I am a proud Kansan. Born and raised, I've attended Kansas schools through Graduate School and have always been grateful for the quality education that I received. My kids have lived in 3 states in their short lives, and I can say unequivocally there is no other place I'd rather raise and educate them than Kansas. There is a lot that Kansas does right with education. As we consider the budget for transportation, it is my hope that the kids are always in the forefront of the conversation. Safety matters. So let's do the right thing.