



Testimony before the

House Insurance and Pensions

on

HB 2593

Jerry Henn, Assistant Executive Director - USA-Kansas and Kansas School Superintendents Association

Oral and written Testimony provided by Jerry Henn on behalf of USA-Kansas and KSSA.

Committee Chair Johnson and Committee Members

Thank you for allowing USA Kansas to testify on HB 2639. As the bill is written now, we stand as a proponent.

In the short term this bill will help our school districts hire licensed staff to work with students. It doesn't solve the problem, but it provides us the opportunity to establish a plan for a longer term solution.

The pandemic has hit education staffing hard. We've been working for years to develop a new pathway to teaching, but the pandemic accelerated the job openings in education. There were 1,253 teaching jobs that went unfilled this year, that is up from 980 from just 5 years ago. We anticipate this number to be even higher next year. Many of these openings are caused by teachers retiring. Current law will not allow a retired educator to return to school employment for 180 days and once they return, they incur an additional 16% KPERs penalty on top of the normal 14% combined KPERs contribution.

We completely understand the concerns that brought the state to this retirement wait time, but we are currently facing a staffing crisis in Kansas and we need options. If we could shorten the length of time a retiree needs to remain out of contract to 45 days and remove the additional penalty, we believe this will help fill valuable positions and support the students as they move forward on their educational path at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. In most situations teachers retire in good faith for a multitude of reasons, and administrators are optimistic, but nervous, if they can fill the positions for the next school year. The reality is if the administrators can't fill the positions they need options, and if we can help provide a positive option at least in the short term, it's worth it. We would recommend opening this window for two years, through June 30, 2024, to give us time to develop a new plan and start increasing our staffing numbers.