

Comment Report

Education

Date: 01/30/2024

Time: 02:30 PM

Location: RM 102, Sup. Ct. Consult

Name: Caleb Bonjour

Comment: Dear Members of the House Education Committee, I am writing to you as the Superintendent of a small, rural school district in Iowa to express my profound disapproval of HSB 542, including its recent amendments. As an educator deeply invested in the future of our students and the quality of education in our state, I find the proposed changes in this bill concerning, even with the provision to allow districts to retain some additional funds. The revised bill, while appearing to offer a compromise by enabling districts to keep more funds, fails to address the core issue: the significant reduction in the capacity and efficiency of Area Education Agencies (AEAs). These agencies are not just service providers; they are vital partners in our educational ecosystem. AEAs offer specialized expertise and resources that cannot be replicated by individual districts, especially those in rural areas like ours. The proposed changes still result in our inability to access essential resources and expertise in a timely and efficient manner. Collaborating with local school leaders and content area experts through the AEAs has been a cornerstone of our educational strategy, contributing significantly to our successes. The bill's changes do not adequately explain how funding will be managed or how AEAs will continue to operate effectively. This lack of clarity is a source of great concern for our district and others across the state. Furthermore, the rationale behind the introduction of this bill remains unclear. AEAs in Iowa have consistently received high praise for their services and support. They have been recognized nationally as exemplary models in the education sector. It is perplexing why a system that has been so effective and beneficial is being targeted for such drastic changes. This proposed legislation seems to undermine a well-established and successful structure without a clear or justified reason. The potential impact of these changes is enormous. They threaten to widen the gap in educational equity, especially impacting rural districts like ours that rely heavily on AEAs for specialized services. It is not just about the financial aspect but the overall accessibility and quality of educational support that our students and teachers will receive. In conclusion, I urge the committee to reconsider the implications of HSB 542. Our focus should be on strengthening and supporting our AEAs, not diminishing their capacity to serve our communities. As educational leaders, we should be building on the successes of our AEAs, ensuring that every child in Iowa, regardless of their district, has access to the best possible education. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I am available for further discussion and to provide insights into the impact of these proposed changes on our district and others like it across Iowa. Sincerely, Caleb Bonjour Superintendent, Gladbrook Reinbeck CSD

Name: Abby Herriman

Comment: I am writing to express my concern with HSB 542, a bill that, in my view, poses a serious threat to education in our rural communities. As a concerned citizen, I urge you to vote against this legislation to safeguard the wellbeing and future of our schools. HSB 225, if enacted, appears to lack the necessary considerations for the unique challenges faced by rural education institutions. The potential consequences of this bill may lead to detrimental effects on the quality of education, teacher retention, and overall community wellbeing. I implore you to carefully consider the long-term ramifications of HSB 542 on our rural schools and vote against its passage. It is crucial to prioritize sustainable and equitable policies that support the diverse

needs of all our communities.

Name: Jude Schwalbach

Comment: My name is Jude Schwalbach, and I'm a senior education policy analyst with Reason Foundation, a national 501c(3) nonprofit policy research organization. I'm testifying on Iowa House File 134. Iowa H.F. 134 ensures that a school district cannot limit or stop other school districts from transporting transfer students using open enrollment across the district's boundaries. While this proposal doesn't require that school districts provide transportation to cross-district transfer students, it ensures that school districts willing to provide transportation to cross-district transfers are not stopped from doing so. H.F. 134 would be a step in the right direction. Regulatory blocks on students' transportation options unduly restrict their education options, especially students from low-income households whose parents lack the means to drive them to another school district. Weakening these regulatory barriers by letting school districts transport cross-district transfer students can help students access schools that are the right fit. Iowa policymakers should also consider creative policy reforms that alleviate the transportation burden for low-income families. For instance, Wisconsin reimburses the cross-district transfer students from low-income families for up to \$1,218 per year in mileage expenses for student transportation costs. Iowa policymakers could provide a similar service to cross-district students from low-income families when the receiving school district cannot provide transportation to them. Finally, to ensure that school districts clearly communicate their transportation options to students using cross-district open enrollment, they should be required to post all open enrollment policies and procedures, as well as their available capacity by grade level, on their websites. This ensures that the open enrollment process is transparent and easy for parents to navigate. Strengthening Iowa's open enrollment policy would help ensure that public schools are available to all students and further empower families to find public schools that are the right fit for their kids.

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