



Greater Nebraska Schools Association

P.O. Box 82889 • Lincoln, Nebraska 68501-2889

DATE: 2/1/23

TO: Revenue Committee, Senator Lou Ann Linehan, Chairperson

RE: LB 589

Chairwoman Linehan and members of the Revenue Committee,

My Name is Kyle Fairbairn, and I represent the Greater Nebraska Schools Association (GNSA) which is an organization that represents 25 of the largest school districts in the state of Nebraska. These 25 districts represent over 70% of all the children in the state attending public schools. These public schools also represent 88% of all the minority children in the state that attend public schools.

I come to you today opposed to LB 589 in its current form. The amendment that was added to this bill yesterday afternoon has not been thoroughly looked at by the whole organization. I was unable to pull all of the GNSA schools together and we had voted to oppose this bill at our meeting last week. GNSA wants to thank the Governor for taking time to meet with all education groups in order to have open discussion about public education. This is a rare occasion that the Governor has gotten this involved in the education of children attending public schools.

The reason for the opposition to this bill is it would put additional caps on public schools that already are capped on both the amount of money that they are able to tax at the local level and also the amount of growth that is attached to the way the state of Nebraska calculates the state aid to local school districts. These 2 caps already put drastic limits on the schools I represent by limiting their ability to raise salaries and keep class size at a manageable level for the teachers and staff in these districts.

A majority of the schools that are in GNSA are currently at the levy lid limit that is already imposed by the state. Many argue that property taxes continue to go up in these districts each year giving the districts an increase in overall funding. The fact is that for an equalized school district like the GNSA member schools the amount of increase in the district property is then offset by a loss in state aid. The formula for a non-equalized school district works differently but for GNSA schools that are at the levy limit the increase in funds is only controlled by the growth in the funding formula used in the equalization of state aid that is also capped by the state.

The caps that are currently in place greatly effect the ability of school districts in GNSA to raise salaries at all staff levels in our districts. Salary cost in schools is usually between 80 to 85% of overall cost and teachers' salaries make up a majority of all salary cost. The Omaha World reported that unfilled teaching positions across the state increased by 60% in the past year. Unfilled positions are over 760 in teaching alone. Schools also have been unable to fill paraprofessionals, food service employees, bus drivers and custodial positions. School positions are not alone in fighting for qualified staff in order to fill needed spots. The state of Nebraska has also struggled to find qualified employees but there seems to be a way that the state has addressed this issue. The Omaha World Herald reported that state correction officials reported that correction workers were given a 20% increase in pay while a

current negotiated contract was in place. State Patrol staff were given a 22% increase in pay with more in the out years of the contract and state employees negotiated contracts with increases up to 27%. There is no doubt that state employees needed these raises to be competitive in the market, but let's look at teachers settlements for the coming year. I have gotten information from several GNSA schools for the upcoming year the total salary packages for teaching staff range from between 3.8% and 5.2%. Those amounts are a long way from what the state is doing to maintain their staffs. The current lids placed on the schools I represent cannot match the things the state was able to do.

The only way for school districts to be competitive with not only other local school districts and pressure from states that recruit the Midwest to fill their vacancies is to address the salary issues and make young people want to go into the profession. This is not only true with teachers but also all of the support staff that make our public schools what they are. The last rankings of public schools showed that Nebraska ranks eighth in the country in quality of public schools behind 7 East Coast states that spend dramatically more on public education.

Again, I would like to thank the Governor for his support of public education. We look forward to working together to help fix the concerns that GNSA has with this bill.