



March 8, 2018
Susan Willis, Chief Financial Officer
USD 259 - Wichita Public Schools

Chairman Patton, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of HB 2561. Wichita Public Schools transports almost 17,000 students daily as part of the District's mission to provide quality education to all students. Thousands of parents depend upon safe, reliable and timely transportation services as part of their children's access to public education. The District depends upon transportation state aid funding to provide this critical service.

Wichita has over 15,000 students who live more than 2.5 miles from school making them eligible for transportation services. As identified in the Legislative Post Audit (LPA), Wichita spent \$11.6 million in 2016-17 to provide transportation services to those students. The District received \$8 million in transportation state aid in 2016-17, leaving the District to cover a \$3.6 million shortfall with other funding.

Within funding calculation using the minimum funding level that has long been in practice but is not in statute, Wichita only received enough state aid to cover **69%** of cost to transport students living more than 2.5 miles away. Removing the minimum funding level reduces our transportation aid by \$3 million, meaning Wichita would only receive funding to cover **43%** of cost of providing required transportation services. Our total shortfall would become \$6.6 million.

Additionally, the District further chose to provide transportation services to about 2,000 students living less than 2.5 miles from school who otherwise would have walked hazardous routes or who needed transported to where they could receive appropriate ELL services. The District covered 100% of that \$1 million cost with other funds. The safety of students, coupled with efficiencies gained in centralizing ELL services, outweighed the lack of transportation funding. But if added into the overall shortfall for Wichita, that total becomes \$7.6 million.

Very few districts have Wichita's level of transportation complexity. Wichita operates a 3 tier busing system, whereby a single bus will pick up students at an early start location, then pick up another set of students for a later start location, and then again pick up another set of students for an even later start location. Since Wichita pays a daily rate for a bus, this tiered structure maximizes efficiency for each bus in service. Additionally, routes are analyzed daily to determine if there are any savings to be gained from modifying routes within the 154 square miles within the District's boundaries. **All of this work is done to stretch dollars as far as possible.** To get some idea of this complexity, a bus routing map to Northeast Magnet is included as part of this written testimony.

Wichita does have a robust Magnet School program, whereby parents can choose an academic experience that best matches a child's interest and learning style. Not only is the Magnet program popular with students and parents, but the program also keeps Wichita in compliance with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The OCR allowed the District to end busing to achieve desegregation through

development of the Magnet program, which requires the District transport any student living more than 2.5 miles from the selected Magnet location. Any erosion of transportation funding could put compliance with this agreement at risk.

Student transportation in Wichita is rife with challenges. High at-risk population, high-density of students within the city, and a critical shortage of bus drivers add to these challenges. The District is currently short about 20-30 buses due to lack of drivers. Additionally, the District will face inflationary pressure if diesel fuel prices begin to trend upwards and as its transportation contract ends in 2020. The District will be then be faced with even a more critical underfunding situation.

Mr. Chairman, any funding reductions to transportation state aid simply exacerbate our challenges. It was precisely the challenges faced by large, densely populated districts that led to the minimum funding level practice, as well as the LPA's recommendation that the Legislature codify a funding minimum for large, densely populated districts. For Wichita, this is a \$3 million decision. What is \$3 million to Wichita Public Schools? It is 50 teachers, counselors and social workers. It is 15 more student contact days as we return to our pre-block grant school calendar. It is a 1.5% salary increase to teachers to continue to attract quality teachers to a large, urban school district. Or, it is the cost of what we must forego to cover the loss of transportation funding that already doesn't fully cover our costs.

Wichita stands in strong support of HB 2561, and we would urge the committee to advance this bill.

USD 259: Northeast Magnet Bus Routes 72 Buses (65 Regular Ed and 7 Special Ed)

