



ARLEN H. SIEGFREID
SPEAKER PRO TEM

July 27, 2009

To: The Facilities Closure and Realignment Commission

We write to express strong concern about a possible closure or consolidation of the Kansas School for the Deaf.

Though this institution has become a critical part of this community and its economy over the past 100 years and provides wonderful learning opportunities for its students, any consolidation or closure, first and foremost, must be made with an eye toward sound business practices.

Consolidation may sound reasonable on the surface, but such an effort must prove to be cost effective with a significant return on any required upfront capital investment. Given the budget challenges we face, that return must be realized in the short-term rather than in the coming years or even decades.

That being said, our concern centers on the significant costs associated with a consolidation. In order to comply with state and federal laws for accommodations, substantial investments must be made in a new or updated facility. In addition to capital costs, investments are likely required for professional staffing and training to meet students' needs—also mandated by state and federal law. Those costs must be proven to be recouped in a short timeframe through savings associated with consolidation or closure.

In addition, the closure of this school would additionally burden public schools in terms of providing facilities, expertise and staffing to accommodate special needs. There is a significant lack of qualified staff/teacher support to provide services, not only in larger urban areas, but across the state. These costs must prove to be less than what is necessary at the current facility, and there must be substantive proof that qualified instructors and staff would be available to provide federally mandated services for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Throughout our history, Johnson County and Olathe have fostered a culture of understanding and appreciation for the deaf and hard of hearing that is unique to the State of Kansas, and no one would like to see that change. We as legislators are in a unique position to truly understand just how difficult the impending budget crisis is. We recognize that the state faces difficult financial decisions.

(more)

Page 2

However, we have strong reservations that this move, while plausible at face value, would realistically result in no savings or worse yet—increased costs. Until potential savings are adequately and qualitatively proven, we strongly oppose consolidating or closing the Kansas State School for the Deaf in Olathe.

Sincerely,



Rep. Arlen Siegfried
Rep. Marvin Kleeb
Rep. Ron Worley

Rep. Pat Colloton
Rep. Rob Olson
Rep. Kevin Yoder

Rep. Terry Huntington
Rep. Scott Schwab

Rep. Mike Kiegerl
Rep. Sheryl Spalding

Sen. Karin Brownlee

Sen. Julia Lynn

Sen. Mary Pilcher-Cook

Sen. David Wysong

CC: Hon. Mark Parkinson
Dr. Robert Maile