

Senate Education Committee  
June 2, 2011

Chair Shapiro and Members:

My name is Sarah Winkler and I am the Vice President of the Alief ISD Board of Trustees. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today **in support of SB 8**. This bill is very important to school districts. It is so important to Alief that I am missing one of our high school graduations in order to be here today and I have never missed a ceremony in 14 years.

Specifically, I very much appreciate the provisions of the bill addressing salaries and furloughs. Our goal is to adopt a fiscally responsible budget that maintains the programs and services our students need to succeed. Retaining our staff is vital to maintaining those programs. SB 8 will provide us with much needed options for reducing our district's payroll expenses and most importantly, will *allow us to save employee jobs*.

- As you know, current law prohibits us from reducing the salaries of teachers, nurses, counselors, librarians and speech pathologists. Because we cannot reduce their salaries, we also cannot furlough them. We need these flexibilities since that group of employees makes up 72% of our payroll expenses.
- Other district employees - bus drivers, our cafeteria workers, our janitors and our administrators - are not similarly protected. Since salaries and benefits make up almost 90% of our budget, any serious attempt to reduce costs requires that we reduce payroll expenses. We currently have only two options at our disposal: fire employees and/or reduce the salaries of the lowest and highest paid employees. By the way, only 3.5% of our employees are campus and district administrators so reducing their salaries does not provide us with much budget flexibility.
- Alief has always tried to treat all of our employees fairly and equitably. SB 8 would allow us to treat all district employees the same which is much better for morale.
- Please note that if we have the ability to furlough, we would apply this to all employees – not just teachers. Again, we want to treat our staff equitably and have no intention of balancing our budget on the backs of teachers or students since the number of instructional days would not change.
- Each furlough day saves us approximately \$1,200,000. A single furlough day equates to 24 positions at an average salary of \$50,000. It's easy math, giving us the ability to furlough will allow us to *save employees' jobs*.
- We frequently hear that districts should operate more like businesses. All other employers have the ability to furlough employees and/or to lower salaries. In

fact, my husband is currently furloughed 4 hours per week, which is 2 days per month. SB 8 gives school boards the same flexibility as other employers.

I wish that there was no need for this legislation, but HB 1 takes away the money that got us to the 2010-11 salaries. My district is facing a \$17.9M cut the first year of the biennium. We desperately need the options contained in SB 8 to balance our budget while minimizing layoffs. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in favor of SB 8. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.