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Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, my name is Amanda Petrick. My husband and I farm and ranch north of Elgin, we have four school aged children, and I am a member of the Elgin New Leipzig School Board District #49. I am here today because I oppose HB 1251 and believe it will have an adverse effect on our rural school districts as well as the quality of our children's education.

Firstly, I would like to say that our superintendents cannot be replaced. They truly are the heart of the school, which is the heart of most of our communities. Our schools need the top-down leadership our superintendents provide. And our children need to see that behavior so they can learn to model it in their own lives. We have a small school by some standards, especially by the parameters of this bill. As an example, our school would potentially end up sharing one superintendent with three more schools. Because of our location this would include two time zones, four counties, and 2,704 square miles. In one week, we could expect seeing our superintendent one day. All duties of the superintendent to be completed in one day for each school district, with separate boards and separate policies, is an atrocious ask. As we all know we live in an instant gratification world that is not favorable of letting something sit on an empty desk for at least a week before it is seen and even longer to be handled and addressed. Education moves fast, schools move fast. Our kids are learning at pace we couldn't have imagined when we were in school. Our superintendents are the captain of the boat. They are the ones at the helm ensuring its smooth sailing.

I understand the basis for the pay cap for the superintendents, but honestly, I cannot see the savings as a school board member. Not only will our superintendents be making less than our teachers, but they will also not be able to be compensated for other non-superintendent duties such as referee, bus driver, custodian, etc. And as a board we will now need to consider hiring an assistant superintendent or giving more duties to our current principals. The 2022-2023 school year has been the first school year in while that our school has had a different person in each superintendent, secondary principal, and elementary principal position. As a board member it has been eye opening. The things that were 'lost' because our previous superintendent/principal just didn't have the time to get to them because of his dual role are surprising. And it will happen again if we cut our superintendent's time in our school. Burn out is a real thing in our workforce and there is just not enough time in the day for one person to handle 4-5 schools. Even though currently schools can share superintendents, this is why we made the decision to not share a superintendent as well as have separate principals. Our school boards for each district know the unique challenges that are faced and can make the best decision for each respective area. This bill will take away our local control to do just that.

Lastly, I want to mention our rural communities. There is a lot of them; we are by all definitions a rural state. Our district is currently 694.43 square miles. We have 162 K-12 students in our school plus preschool. Honestly, we have more kids in our district, but the distance is an issue. Some homeschool, or open enroll to a closer school (rural roads aren't always straight). The point is everyone finds a school and a community to go with it. They are generally tied together. I feel this bill introduces a slippery slope. Combining superintendents, then what's next? Our communities' heart beats in the schoolhouse. Yes, some of us have a hospital, an implement dealer, maybe a mine, or if you're lucky some oil wells nearby. But all the people in these professions have kids too. We need to provide the best we can for our kids locally. Fiscally, children do not turn a profit. No decent parent makes the decision to have a child based on the profitability. So naturally our education funding doesn't have a monetary return on investment. We do need to manage spending, but not at the expense of our children's education or our communities' heartbeat.

Thank you for your time today.

