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March 20, 2003

Assembly Parks, Members of the Committee

My name is Vikki Courtney. I am here today to speak to you as a teacher, a parent, and as a citizen of this state. I am here to ask you to find a way to fund education to at LEAST the national average.

Currently I teach Kindergarten for half of the day and in the afternoon I provide literacy support for struggling readers in both the 1st and 4th grades. I have 28 students in my kindergarten class. One of the main goals I am expected to achieve is for each of those 5 and 6 year olds to be ready to read... if not reading by the time they set foot outside of my classroom on June 6th.

At this point I can say with confidence that 20 of those children will meet that goal. Eight of those students are on very shaky ground, not because of my teaching ability or their lack of ability. Just because they either are not developmentally ready to learn these things, or they do not have a support group at home or a variety of other reasons. The harsh reality of the situation is that if I decided to retain those 8 children because they are not ready for 1st grade, I would start next year out with 36 children. In short, this means my success rate would be even less! I will no longer be able to be the nurturing teacher, rather my function as a teacher will dramatically change and be diminished to that of a monitor who is in charge of crowd control rather than educating our future achievers. The problem does not simply

disappear it continues to exacerbate! That's where you the legislator comes in.

Through the wisdom of previous legislators and teachers we have been provided realistic and workable solutions to the problem of those students, such as my kindergartners, who will not be ready by June 6th. A workable solution in the form of class size reduction has been a reality, however, it requires the monetary funds to implement and support it. Nevada's problem is not finding committed and dedicated individuals it is finding the money to support successful choices. In my personal experience it has been through class size reduction that I know those eight students will have the opportunity to get the personal attention they need in first grade because they will be in a class with 12 less children vying for one teacher's attention . Fewer students does mean greater success, but it requires funding for education to at least the national level.

Let me switch roles from being a teacher to a parent in this state. Speaking to you as the parent of the 3 children who are in middle and high school I know the critical need for funding to attract and retain quality teachers. My oldest daughter has been in math and biology classes where there are 40 to 50 students in a class. There are not enough desks, books, or even teachers to go around! What sort of message are we sending to our youth? Without proper funding these students will continue to face larger class sizes with fewer opportunities to practice and acquire the skills they need.

Why tie the hands of students and teachers and make learning a hardship and test of endurance rather than a compelling and motivating experience? If we want a nation of achievers we cannot continue to provide mediocrity and to MAKE DO without. I ask you, how can a child acquire the skills and knowledge required for college admissions to competitive schools or acquire important knowledge needed to be an active member of a global economy if they cannot obtain an opportunity for a quality education? Teachers have spent too many years becoming the best they can be to not be given the opportunity to do what they do best. Funding for education to at LEAST the national average is your legacy to these children and teachers. It is the key to our future and we must decide to use the key or allow the lock to continue to rust and deteriorate from lack of funds and attention.

Finally, as a proud citizen of Nevada, I want the rest of the country to look to Nevada and say, "That is the place I want to live. They do not turn their backs to the future, instead they warmly embrace the challenge and change that is necessary and have the leadership who realize that commitment and consistency are simply not enough to solve the educational funding problem and are willing to make choices, sometimes tough and requiring sacrifice, that will empower the next generation."

Be courageous, be a leader, fund education to at least the national average and do it in a way that is practical and beneficial to all children. Do it, so that I don't have to come back every two years and repeat my requests and pleas and be forced to pass the burden and inadequacies we are experiencing today to another generation. I want to spend and share my: time, strength, efforts, and devotion with my students and my own children so they can be the very best they can be. I implore you to help me to make that happen!