

House Committee on Education, March 5, 2015

In opposition to

HB 2345 – Prohibiting School Board Members From Having a Conflict of Interest

**By Gail M. Billman, School Board Member USD 506 Labette County;
Region 3 Vice President, Kansas Association of School Boards**

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **HB 2345** and share my opposition. I am a speech-language pathologist and have worked in both the medical and special education arenas over my 23-year career. As a previous management-level healthcare provider, I answered to a Board that was made up of employees as well as community members. I had great faith and respect for that Board, as they left personal views alone and made sound decisions based on facts.

I chose to run for my local school board after much consideration. I was, and am currently employed by a special education agency and I serve students within my own school district. Prior to running for USD 506 School Board, I was approached by a number of individuals who asked me to run. Their requests were not because I had an agenda, but because there was confidence in my character, loyalty and ability to look at facts to make decisions that is best for children and the district.

I visited with my employer as well as the district and both assured me that there was not a conflict of interest. There was, and currently is not a conflict of interest in my current employment and role as a Board Member. I won a local election because I was the best person for the position in the opinion of the voters.

Currently, my father and mother-in-law are bus drivers in the district. I have one fellow board member who has a son employed in facilities, and two who have wives that are substitute teacher. This represents 4 of our current board members. We have another potential board member who has a wife employed in our district. There are no positions being contested in our upcoming election. No positions contested may be due to no interest or due to confidence in our current Board.

Our Board does not have current policy regarding conflict of interest; we have something more important. We have integrity. We have our own checks and balances at the local level. At any time that there is a situation among executive session that may lead to a conflict of interest, we will remove ourselves from the meeting.

We, as a Board, are all professional people, volunteering our time with no hidden agenda for personal gain. Sure, my life would be much easier if you determined I could no longer serve my local school board or my position as Region 3 Vice President at Kansas Association of School Boards. However, I did my “homework”, and I have chose to dedicate my personal time to serve.

I urge you, please do not take away my opportunity to volunteer for something I believe. Let me continue to hold myself, my decisions and my fellow Board Members to the high standards we have created locally. If this would pass to law, HB 2345 has the potential to eliminate over half of my current local school board. This is NOT what our voters desire.

Please cease HB 2345 and let us continue to do our work for the communities we know and understand.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony