

Testimony before the  
Senate Ethics and Elections Committee  
in opposition to  
**SB 171 – Elections; municipalities and special districts; spring to fall; other changes.**

by  
Judith Deedy, Executive Director of **Game On for Kansas Schools**  
grassroots advocacy organization, 501c4

February 11, 2015

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

We are submitting this written testimony in opposition to SB 171 as parents of public school students.

[Game on for Kansas Schools](#) is a nonpartisan grassroots effort among Kansans who share a belief in high-quality public education as a right of all Kansas students. We advocate for Kansas public schools to ensure our teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members all have the resources necessary to deliver quality education to all Kansas students. We inform the community about issues and legislation affecting students in Kansas. The Game On leadership team currently includes over 30 members, representing the spectrum of education stakeholders (parents, educators, and other community advocates), with children attending more than 25 different Kansas public schools. Our followers on social media include over 4,900 people from all over Kansas. We are nonpartisan and welcome anyone interested in protecting Kansas public education. Our efforts include raising awareness, evaluating policy, accountability, public discourse, and contributing solutions where real problems exist.

We are opposed to this bill on multiple grounds. We support efforts to increase voter turnout, but believe that mail-in ballots or weekend voting could be as effective as moving the elections. We are deeply concerned that even if turnout is deemed higher because these elections are combined with federal and state elections, many voters will be unaware that they are going to be voting on school board members. Ensuring voter turnout is not the same as ensuring informed voter turnout. We know the difficulty of following multiple elections and trying to determine which candidates to elect. While turnout is currently low for school board elections, at least the people voting in them are generally aware that those are the races in which they are participating. We read of testimony during the interim hearings about ballot drop-off and share that concern as well.

We are also concerned about primary elections for school boards being held in August and school board members taking office in January. We know that parents are under-represented in August primaries as many families are away on vacation after the end of summer activities and before school starts. To hold school board primaries when many of the most significant stakeholders are known to be out of town is not an improvement. We also want our school board members' terms to coincide with the academic year. We believe it would be detrimental to have school board members starting their terms in January, when the school year is half over.

We disagree that this bill is about promoting local control. We are aware that many school boards and municipalities are opposing this bill. If we truly honor local control, we will listen to our local communities and respect their judgment about how the interests of their local communities are best protected.

We believe making school board elections partisan would be a mistake. We have seen that many people who serve on school boards consider themselves apolitical. They are stepping forward as stewards of their communities. We believe these people would be more reluctant to run for school boards if they knew they were subjecting themselves to the partisan fights that often accompany statewide races. We also note that federal employees in the executive branch or military are prohibited from running in partisan races. We believe they should be allowed to run for school board seats, as they are now.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that we have seen a proposal to reinstitute straight-ticket voting in Kansas. We can see how this would solve the problem of ballot drop-off, but we have no confidence that this would ensure that informed ballots are being cast on school board races.

We urge you to oppose SB 171 and vote NO on this bill if it comes to a vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Deedy  
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